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AN ACTRESS'S PILGRIMAGE

AN
ACTRESS'S
PILGRIMAGE

BY
INA ROZANT



LONDON
T. SEALEY CLARK
1, RACQUET COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1906

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1906

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AN ACTRESS'S PILGRIMAGE



CHAPTER I

THE START

OFF at last !

It seemed too good to be true, as we steamed out of Euston on a broiling day towards the end of August, and I felt that I was fairly on the way to become a Sarah Siddons or Bernhardt. Almost from my babyhood I had hankered for the footlights, and I had had so many disappointments in my struggles to get upon the stage, that when at last I really got the offer of a tiny part (and chorus) in that popular classical play, *The Days of Nero*, sent out by a well-known manager, I was ready to jump for joy.

Only towards the end of the rehearsals, did it dawn upon my amateur brain that the tour was a "Fit-up." The word will be a familiar one to every professional, but for the benefit of the ordinary reader, I may explain that it is what is known as "a small theatre tour." This means that we scarcely ever visited a large town where there was a real theatre, but played in small

towns—sometimes little more than villages—where there happened to be a good-sized hall, Assembly Rooms, a Mechanics' Institute with a big room attached, a Corn Exchange, or even a disused and enclosed market-building.

We stayed sometimes one night, sometimes two, sometimes three, according to the size of the town, and were obliged to take everything with us, footlights, limelights, drop scene, and the whole paraphernalia of a theatre in miniature. We were utterly dependent upon our own staff as to whether things went right or wrong, as the only assistance to be had was unskilled labour. Our advance agent saw to the putting up of the stage if there was none, but several times we arrived at a hall while the former was still in rough-and-ready process of construction. I believe that in a common class of "Fit-up" tour, the actors often have to help with the baggage and the scenery, but ours was a "Dan Drake" Company, and we prided ourselves accordingly, as we sped for many hours on that sweltering Saturday in late August, through drought-parched country and fields of golden grain, awaiting beneath a blaze of summer sun the coming of the reaper, towards the little Welsh watering-place, where *The Days of Nero* was to open on the following Monday.

Ah! "Pride goes before a fall!" I was not the only beginner in the company. Others there were, greener still than I, girls from suburban homes, who had never heard the word "Fit-up," and more than one boy almost fresh from school. We little knew what lay before us in the many weeks between that blazing August day and bleak December, when the tour would end, and we should return once more to

London town. "Where ignorance is bliss," &c., was a true bill in our case !

We arrived at our destination about seven o'clock, very hot and tired, and after a good meal at a Temperance Hotel (I had left my small baggage at the station and my trunk was taken charge of by the baggage-man), I started off to find lodgings. Had I been an old "pro." I should have known that my first business on arriving in a town was to "settle diggings," hungry or not, but all my experience was yet to come !

I was the odd one in the company, as all the other girls had already found chums, but this troubled me little save for the expense, it being far cheaper to share rooms with another person. It was the fag-end of the season, but there were still many visitors in the town, and I had a good deal of difficulty in getting "settled." I tried seven or eight places without success, and on getting rooms at last, had to pay what seemed to me later on an exorbitant price, 15s. for five nights, but I have learnt many a lesson in economy since those days. I was quite unaccustomed to lodgings, as I had always stayed at boarding-houses or with friends when visiting the seaside, and it was a new experience to find that my landlady expected me to go out and provide dinner for Sunday, and buy other necessities, so that it was late in the evening when I had finished my catering, and what with the long journey and the excessive heat, I was quite done up ! My rooms, however, were delightful though very small. I had a wee bachelor bedroom and a dear little sitting-room, exquisitely clean and overlooking the harbour. The house belonged to a young married couple, who took great interest in me and were most attentive, and I was

very comfortable and happy in my first "professional diggings."

I slept like a top and awoke late on Sunday morning, full of enthusiasm and eager curiosity as to the new world in which I found myself. I dressed quickly, and after a hasty breakfast, made my way to a pretty little church close down by the sea. It was thronged with visitors—they can be so easily distinguished from an ordinary congregation—and I could not help speculating as I looked around, as to whether many of them would be present next evening at our first representation of *The Days of Nero*.

Service over, I returned to my rooms, and after an early dinner, spent the remainder of that lovely, peaceful Sunday in scrambling over the rocks and roaming along cliffs and shore, in lonely, happy carelessness of theatres, grease-paints, and "Fit-up" tours.

Next morning I was off to the Pier Pavilion in good time, but the scene on the stage which met my uninitiated eye seemed "confusion worse confounded." It reminded me of the ladies and gentlemen in "The Chough and Crow," who, in every conceivable tone of voice and shade of expression, persist in telling you that "It is—it is—it is our opening day."

All the theatre and private baskets lay about in front of the stage—there was nowhere else to stow them—and we were told by the stage-manager, Mr. Cobb, to take out our "make-up" and things we required at night as quickly as possible to the dressing-rooms, as the baskets were going to be packed up and covered out of sight. I found my way up a short staircase to the ladies' dressing-rooms on the O.P. side, and after a search discovered my name pencilled with five others on a dirty scrap of paper gummed to the door of a very

small room near the stage. There seemed to me hardly room for two people to turn round, but I had yet to learn what could be done in the way of a tight fit, and that we were lucky indeed to have three dressing-rooms between the fourteen ladies belonging to the company. I went down again, and scrambling over many baskets, reached my trunk with difficulty and managed to unstrap it, making several journeys to the dressing-room with "make-up" box, comb and brush, shoes, tights, and the many little articles I needed for my theatre toilet. Nothing was found for us but the actual dresses. These were in charge of the wardrobe mistress, and my next business was to seek her out and ask what garments I must wear at night. Mrs. Dighton looked at me with a troubled face.

"Why, I didn't know there were any more," she said. "Nearly all the ladies chose their dresses before we left London. How was it you didn't come to me then?"

"I knew nothing whatever about it," I replied. "No one told me what to do."

"Well," said Mrs. Dighton, "there are only very shabby things left, but I'll see what I can do. You know we had the dresses from the 'A' Company, and they had new ones, but these have all been cleaned."

She turned over a lot of dingy things in a couple of baskets and picked out two faded silk gowns which I tried on over my ordinary clothes. The first was much too large, and would not do at all; the second, a scanty little gown of very old pink silk made like a nightdress, but without gores, low-necked, minus sleeves, and drawing up with a tape round the shoulders, Mrs. Dighton pronounced quite satisfactory, and said she would find some silk drapery to go with it.

"Now you want some Christian robes," she said, "but there are only very large ones left, all the best ones have gone, but perhaps one of the taller ladies will change with you." She fished out of a basket a dark green cloth gown, made like the silk one, but with sleeves down to the elbow. It was much too long, but that was easily remedied by turning up the hem. The difficulty was the drapery. I am a scrap of a thing, and my heart sank as I meekly accepted the huge piece of heavy purple cloth Mrs. Dighton handed over to me, and wondered what on earth I was going to do with it.

I put all my small things on a tiny shelf in one corner of the dressing-room and hung the dresses on a peg close by, and then it was time to go back into the Pavilion for rehearsal, which was called for 11.30. After hanging about for some time, however, we were let off with a short music rehearsal, as it was found impossible to let us have the stage, and there was no big room or any place in which we could go through the different scenes. About one o'clock, therefore, most of us were free for several hours, and I spent the greater part of the time down by the sea, speculating—upon many things.

The "show" began at eight o'clock, but all the novices turned up about six, and the others, too, were early, it being the first night, and presently our room seemed packed. It was broiling hot weather, and when the gas was lighted, we were nearly suffocated. The windows were swing ones, opening downwards towards the Pier, and if we opened them more than a very little way the many promenaders could see right in, which was most unpleasant, as we were often in a half-clothed condition. So for a great part of the evening we had

to keep the windows nearly closed, and seemed to be packed like sardines in a little air-tight box.

When we began to dress, there were five girls in the room beside myself—Miss McKenzie, a Scotch girl who had been on the stage about two years, and played a good little part; Gladys Vane, the dancer; Flossie Hare, the solo vocalist (she had till lately been a chorus girl in a *répertoire* "Frivolity" Company, and put on no end of "side"), and Misses Delorme and Gray, bosom friends, beginners like myself, but very conventional girls.

Presently there came a knock at the door and a big, bold-looking girl walked in, saying with a decidedly American accent, "Mr. Rossiter says I'm to dress in here."

We all stared in astonishment and disapproval. The newcomer was very striking in appearance, and had great style—of a certain kind. She had a high colour which we (wrongly) attributed to rouge, a blunt nose, and large mouth with shining white teeth, but her eyes were extraordinary, unlike any I have ever seen; small, dark, glittering like emeralds and set far back in her head, while the brows came down much too close to the heavily pencilled drooping lids. A quantity of light fluffy hair curled closely round the odd face, which though not at all pretty, was decidedly piquant and attractive. But the manners and whole bearing of the girl were anything but what our maiden aunts used to call "ladylike," and nowadays we term "good form." In her hand she carried a small leather bag, containing presumably her "make-up," and over one arm were slung the faded gowns which Mrs. Dighton had rejected for me as being too large. The newcomer walked up to my corner and said coolly, "I'm

going to dress here," and I hastily pushed my things aside to make room for her.

The other girls were looking at each other in dismay. What sort of a young lady was *this* to be in a "Dan Drake" Company?

She at once proceeded to take off her things, cheerfully talking the while.

"I've joined from Liverpool—came on to-day—this is my first tour—only came over from the States last spring—my people would be mad if they knew I was on the stage—my mother thinks I'm staying with friends," and so on and so on.

All this was at first received in silence, but presently the other girls began to talk among themselves, pointedly ignoring the newcomer. I was rather sorry for her, and feeling myself also a bit of a pariah, for somehow all the girls had failed to take to me (possibly it was my own fault, for I sometimes have a brusque manner with strangers which chiefly arises from shyness, only nobody believes it), I began partly from a spirit of defiance of the girls around me and also from a mixture of many other feelings, to "chum up" with Belle Sylvester.

What a time we new girls took to dress and make-up, and what guys we made ourselves with those messy grease-paints! But after all, we were ready much too soon, and one or other kept running out to see if it was time to begin, being promptly ordered back by Mr. Cobb, who, being worn out with the heat and fatigue, was none too amiable.

At last there was a thump at the door. "Overture and beginners, please!" somebody called in a loud voice, and off we scrambled on to the stage.

The scene was a street in Rome, a sort of market-

place, and we were supposed to be the plebeian crowd walking about, but before the curtain rose an anthem was sung by the chorus, and a rattling good chorus it was for the size of our company, only very few of us knew the parts correctly.

The chorus master, Mr. Marconi, stood with his back to the curtain and conducted, using both arms in the process. He looked a very funny figure dressed as a Roman soldier, with scarlet tunic, shining brass helmet and very pink brand-new tights which had evidently been put on in a hurry, for they wrinkled badly down his rather peculiar legs. So many of the legs in our company *were* peculiar, but Marconi's always looked as if they wanted to go round a corner. The anthem over, up went the curtain and the play began.

I'm not going to attempt to describe it, for it must be known to nearly every professional and theatre-goer, and a beautiful, pathetic play it is, with its story of the early Christians living their simple faith amid the Pagan population around them, and bravely going to the stake and the lions for the sake of their religion and their God. At first I used to cry at every rehearsal, but unhappily one quickly gets accustomed to things, pathos and religion included. Among the many artists in the many companies belonging to the manager who sent us out, our especial crowd was always known as "Dan Drake's Sunday School," possibly because he was fond of putting his novices and young people into the small parts, of which there were not a few.

The whole affair was intensely novel and exciting to those of us who were beginners, and we were quite sorry when we had to go off and back to our dressing-room, which seemed a perfect oven. It happened

that none of the novices had ever seen the play "from the front," and we at once hastened to change our dresses lest we should not be ready when called. Miss McKenzie burst out laughing when she saw us struggling into our Christian robes and said, "Why, girls, you'll be smothered this hot night, and you won't be wanted for nearly an hour!" Elsie McKenzie had been two previous tours with the same play and knew what she was talking about, but do you think we believed her? Not much! I had heard many tales of how old "pros" tried to "queer" beginners, and whispered confidentially to Belle Sylvester, "I'm not going to be late for anybody," and she said the same, so by the time the Forest Scene came on and a wholesale slaughter of Christians took place, I fancy some of us had already lost considerably in weight from violent perspiration. The heat of those dresses was awful! Not one of the tall girls would change with me, and I was fairly at my wits' end what to do with the many yards of heavy woollen material that formed my Christian drapery. I wound them round and round my small person till I must have looked like a mummy or a chrysalis, and though I used a quantity of large safety-pins to keep the drapery in place, the ends would draggle on the ground and trip me up. Classical robes are certainly graceful and easy to manage when one gets the knack of draping them, but for the first two or three weeks the draperies were my utter despair!

We had several changes during the evening from Pagans into Christians and back again, and much to my astonishment people playing quite good parts had to "super" in order to help make a crowd. There was a tension and excitement in the whole atmosphere, and every one kept asking, "How's the show going?"

"Oh awful! Rossiter's fit to tear his hair! How can you expect anything to go right with a lot of new people in it and only a week's rehearsal?"

"There'll be a call to-morrow!"

"Call to-morrow? Call every day this week and next, too, at this rate!"

Flossie Hare, the soloist, forgot her words and broke down in her song in the Bacchanalian scene, and when we all went off, she promptly had a fit of hysterics in the dressing-room. We gave her some brandy which made her worse, and between wild bursts of laughter and showers of tears, she declared that nothing in heaven or earth ever could, or would, or should induce her to sing the solos again! Later on she told our actor-manager so, catching him just after one of his exhausting scenes, and he—poor man—half off his head with the lagging play, the apathetic audience and the responsibility of the whole affair resting upon his shoulders, pushed her impatiently away and said, "For Heaven's sake, my good girl, don't worry me now!" a mild enough answer under the circumstances.

Oh! That was a long, exciting evening! But it came to an end at last, and every one heaved a sigh of relief as the curtain fell on the last scene!

"Call every one at twelve to-morrow," we heard Mr. Rossiter saying to Cobb, in his clear, high-pitched voice. "Chorus at eleven—I'm sure I don't know what to do about the songs! Miss Hare declares she cannot sing them and the understudies are not fixed yet! Tell the girls who sing best to come early and let Marconi try them with the solos."

Mr. Cobb spoke first to Miss Delorme who had a fine contralto, but she flatly refused and said she wasn't "going to spoil her voice for anybody!" and then he

asked me whether I thought I could manage the songs.

"I don't know," I said doubtfully, "they're rather high for me, but I'll try," so he told me to be at the Pavilion at a quarter to eleven sharp next morning.

I got back to my "diggings" very late, and worn out with excitement and fatigue, but deeply thankful that my first night on the stage was over at last!

Next day I was punctual to time and tried over the two solos with the pianist and old Marconi. I was very nervous, and the worry and fatigue of the past two days had told terribly on my voice, so truth to tell I sang rather badly.

During the second song Flossie Hare walked in, and the sight of another girl essaying her especial work acted as the necessary stimulant. She wasn't going to stand *that*, and at once retracted her words of the previous night, saying she had been nervous and should get on all right in future. Mr. Rossiter was much relieved and so was I, for I felt that I was not just then up to solo singing, though I had been well accustomed to it before beginning theatre work.

The chorus worked hard for an hour, and then we proceeded to the ordinary rehearsal. Indeed, we were all kept pretty closely at work during the first few days, and the show went better at night in consequence.

Belle Sylvester proposed that she and I should join forces as we were both living alone, and after some hesitation I consented to try the experiment. I wished to lessen my expenses, but seeing that she seemed to have a good deal more money than myself, had great misgivings upon that score and others. She said, however, that she must try to live on her very small salary, as if her people on the other side of the "Herring-

pond" found out she was on the stage, they would at once stop her allowance. At our second town, therefore, we took rooms together and continued to "chum" right through the tour. We suffered in many ways from our inexperience, and paid fearfully through the nose the first few weeks through not knowing professional ways, and from having no addresses of lodgings. Several members of the company had been in many of our towns before, and others had addresses of "diggings" from brother and sister "pros." Sylvester and I were among those who bought their experience hardily, but as the tour progressed, every one suffered more or less from the difficulty of finding rooms. We were an unusually large company to visit most of the small towns in which we played, and few people cared to let lodgings to professionals or "take them in" as they call it. But that was only one drawback out of several. Owing to pressure of business at the office, some of the contracts were not ready for signing when the tour started, mine among them. I daresay it will hardly be believed that I was so absolutely verdant as to leave London without knowing definitely what my salary was to be, taking it for granted that I should be paid the 30s. weekly which I knew to be the average chorus money in a fairly good musical company. Of drama salaries and "small-theatre tours" I knew nothing whatever, consequently they did not enter into my calculations.

Two or three days after starting from town, all the small-part people were given a sovereign "to go on with," Mr. Andrews, the business-manager, kindly saying that he knew the beginning of a tour was always expensive, and that he thought we might possibly be short of money. When the end of the week

arrived, I found to my utter dismay on opening the small sealed envelope enclosing the remainder of my "treasury," that it contained one shilling! Upon anxious inquiry among the other girls, I discovered that four or five others were in like case, but to my companions, some of whom had hitherto merely had the command of a small amount of pocket-money, a guinea a week seemed at present quite a large sum. "Quite enough for beginners!" said our solo vocalist severely, but it was all very well for *her*, because she received £2 per week, and the previous year had begun her professional career at a salary of 30s. I who, before leaving home, had had some small experience of housekeeping, knew well what a little way a pound would go, and my heart sank into my boots, or rather my sandals.

Here we were, however, fairly launched on an expensive "Fit-up" tour, with the magnificent sum of "one one" per week with which to cover our living expenses!

I don't think anybody managed it, though we sometimes made heroic efforts, because we all felt that having started out "on our own," more than one in strong opposition to relatives' and friends' advice, we didn't like to write home for help unless we were really obliged to do so.

No one but the managers had seen the tour list before we left London, and when on the journey down a written copy was passed round (a day or two later printed lists were on sale at one penny each), the few really "old pros" with us were simply aghast! We beginners—simple idiots!—thought it was going to be fine fun seeing so many new places. We were out seventeen weeks and during that time we played in seventy-

three towns ! Of these several were three-night stands, a good many others two-night stands, and about the middle of the tour, we had one whole week in a good large town, and consequently thought ourselves in heaven !

I believe the only thing that kept us going was having quiet Sundays, for we scarcely ever travelled on that day ; only three times as far as I remember during all the time we were out.

We had *over fifty one-night stands*, and looking back now, I almost wonder that those of us who were beginners ever lived to tell the tale.

CHAPTER II

EARLY TRIALS

“ROSIE!”

Away in the land of dreams I was one of a trembling band of Christians, who were being chased by cruel Pagans dressed in flowing silken robes, all down the Pier at Rhyl, when an anxious voice from far away came whispering into my slumbers.

“Rosie! Wake up! I’m so frightened!”

The dream vanished! I opened my eyes with a start, and by the faint light of moonbeams straggling in at the window (we had left the blind up in order to wake early), I saw a tall figure sitting upright in the other bed, the head bristling with shining metal curling-pins.

“Rosie!” came a hoarse whisper again, “I’m *convinced* there’s a lunatic asylum next door, there have been the most awful noises of clanking chains and stealthy footsteps, for the last hour! How ever you can go on quietly snoring all through it, I can’t imagine! There it is again!” said Sylvester with a gasp, and as she spoke a gruesome noise of chains clanking on stones broke on the stillness of the night.

“Rosie, *do* get up and see what it is,” said Sylvester in a peremptory, urging tone.

I didn't quite feel like it, and would much have preferred tucking my head under the bed-clothes, but by this time I was getting accustomed to doing what my companion told me—later on I found it was absolutely necessary to "stand up for my rights" on frequent occasions—and very reluctantly I got out of bed and stole over to the window. We were up on the third floor, and I could easily see down into the yard below. Clank—clank—the chains were dragged about again with a sound that made me shiver.

"Rosie! That's one of the lunatics dragging his chains about," sobbed Sylvester, who was becoming slightly hysterical. "I'm so afraid he'll climb up here and get in at the window."

"He'll have to break his neck first," I said severely, though I felt decidedly nervous myself. "Why, you goose," as a sudden light broke in upon my mind, "it's the dog in the yard chained up to his kennel. Fancy waking me up for that!" and I scrambled back to bed in a most aggrieved frame of mind, which was not improved by violently stubbing my big toe against the bed-post.

We talked for a little while but could not get off to sleep, and were certainly not destined to have a comfortable night, for presently we heard an uncanny sound of drip, drip—pause—drip, drip, drip—longer pause—drip, drip—and so on, which probably came from a leaky cistern, but in the dead of night and in a strange house, suggested a horrible murder and gore weltering through the boards.

Then early in the morning, there was a frightful row in the yard below, like Bedlam let loose. We both jumped out of bed, rushed to the window, and scrambling up on to the dressing-table, poked our

heads out to see what was the matter, being just in time to catch a vision of our tiny, hunch-backed landlady, who was shouting awful things in Welsh at the top of her voice, rushing after a tall man with a long broom. She thumped his head with it and bundled him out of the garden door, before you could say "Jack Robinson."

How we laughed !

The previous day this man had come to do the work, the servant having left quite suddenly, and when I first set eyes on him he was more than "half seas over." Belle Sylvester and I were out most of the day, and had to get our dinner at a restaurant, as the landlady being in bed drunk, we knew there was no hope of getting a meal indoors. After dinner we met one of our boys, and Belle went off for a walk with him along the front, saying she would afterwards go straight on to the theatre.

I went back to the "digs," and the door being on the latch in seaside fashion, turned the handle and walked in. There was no sign of any one about, and when I entered our bedroom it was in the same state as when we had left it.

I took off my hat, flung myself on the bed, all unmade as it was, and dropped off to sleep. When I woke it was nearly six o'clock, and I went downstairs to see if I could get a cup of tea. In the kitchen I encountered this horrid man, who in a somewhat maudlin fashion, kept informing me he "was one of the best fellows in the world," and he'd do anything he could for "such a pretty young lady." I thanked him and suggested I should like a cup of tea, which he presently made, and tray in hand, I trotted upstairs to the dingy drawing-room. Tea over, I had to make

our beds, fill the water jugs, set the supper, and do some other necessary work before going off to the theatre. Of course, if we had been old hands, we should simply have taken our leave and found fresh quarters, but at that time we had a sort of hazy idea that our landlady could compel us to stay the three days for which we had engaged the rooms, or drag us up before a magistrate. Oh! how glad we were when our last morning came! I had to interview old Miss Griffiths before leaving and settle the bill. She was fairly sober now, and wished to dispute the money when I offered her 10s., saying we owed another five. This was true in a sense, as Belle and I had agreed to pay 5s. a night for the two of us. I knew the old woman had a terrific temper, but, risking an exhibition of it, I told her very quietly, but in a most determined manner, that we did not intend to give her another farthing, because we had been wretchedly uncomfortable and obliged to do all the work ourselves. "In fact," said I, "you have broken your bargain in every possible way." Greatly to my relief and astonishment, the old lady subsided into her chair and said no more, so we got away without a fuss. Neither then nor on any future occasion would Belle Sylvester, big creature as she was, ever tackle a landlady, and the interviewing always fell to my share.

Sylvester was the most extraordinary girl I have ever met, such a curious mixture of swagger and aggressiveness, combined with great cowardice in one or two directions. She was morbidly sensitive, and had quick shallow sympathies and easy-going good nature, along with a violent temper and great lack of self-control. She claimed to be American, but I shall always believe that her chief nationality was Liverpool Irish!

Looking back, I often wonder how we ever managed to live together during the four months that tour lasted, for we quarrelled nearly every day and were always threatening to part, yet somehow it never came off ! Belle said I was "fearfully trying" because I had got "such a sharp temper" and was "so horribly tidy," but as for her ! Well, it's of no use trying to further describe her or her ways except as they come out incidentally in the course of the tour.

Our next "stand" was a seaside place in Lancashire, also a three-night town. We arrived on a Sunday afternoon, and had some difficulty in getting settled. After a long hunt, we got some jolly little rooms in a pretty, old-fashioned cottage nearly a mile from the Pier Pavilion where we played. I only objected to one thing, and that was the all-pervading smell of shrimps, particularly *hot* shrimps.

Our landlord was a sailor man who used to take the seaside visitors out in pleasure boats, and partly made his living by netting shrimps and selling them to the shops. These small creatures were boiled in a big copper standing in a corner of the cobble-stoned yard which one had to cross in order to reach the cottage, and were thrown in heaps awaiting their turn to be transformed into tea-table delicacies, and they used to writhe and squirm in a horrible way, as they lay in the sun, long and white and semi-transparent.

They formed the baby's playthings, and he cheerfully crowed with delight as he pulled them to pieces. My sailor landlord looked at me with great contempt when I said I should never want to eat shrimps again, and remarked that "it was all fancy !"

Down at the "show," things were not too pleasant. The Pavilion was small and the dressing-room accommo-

dation very scanty. Some of us were obliged to dress under the stage, and as I could barely stand upright between the beams (I am just five feet in my stockings), you may imagine what it was for the tall ones. Two or three of the girls had been very disagreeable for some days, and one night things came to a crisis.

There had been a fearful storm the night before. The rain had poured in torrents, and had somehow beaten or leaked into a tiny alcove where Misses Delorme and Gray dressed, and through which those of us who did the same under the stage were obliged to pass. One of these ladies had left her new make-up box open and it was full of water, so nearly everything was spoilt, also some of the grease-paints had disappeared. She kept on saying that she "couldn't understand it," and talked at Belle and me in such a way that presently it got my "back up." Mrs. Dighton, the wardrobe mistress, was "walking-on"—she was a very pretty young woman—and was dressing in an out-of-the-way corner just beyond Belle and myself, and after the first scene when there was a long "wait" for many of us, I found her dissolved in tears.

"Oh! Miss Roupell," she sobbed, watery lines straggling down her "make-up." "I've been in the profession for eight years, and never before have I been accused of taking any one's make-up or spoiling their things!"

"What nonsense, Mrs. Dighton!" I said. "Miss Delorme doesn't mean *you*, it's *us* she's talking at, and I'm just going to give her a piece of my mind!"

As I spoke Misses Delorme and Gray (who were such bosom friends that they soon became known to all the company as "The Twins"), came into their dressing place and the grievance began again.

"I really can't understand it, dear, can you?"

"No, darling—things can't go without hands, and besides it's so *strange* that everything should be *soaked* with water."

Mrs. Dighton in the distance wept again, Sylvester snorted with indignation, and with boiling blood I popped out from underneath the stage and faced those two tall ladies.

"Perhaps you'll kindly say," I began with elaborate politeness, "whom you suspect of having stolen your make-up," and then suddenly losing my temper, "It's a pity you two can't make yourselves a little more pleasant. You've been horridly disagreeable to Sylvester and me ever since the tour began, and I can't imagine why, for we're civil enough to *you*, and we've all got something else to do here than to go round doing mean tricks, spoiling other people's things, and stealing their grease-paints! The heavy rain leaking in last night is quite enough to account for the water in your box ; you shouldn't have left it open, and it serves you quite right for not taking the trouble to shut it. You've made Mrs. Dighton cry, and you've systematically done everything you could to hurt our feelings ever since we started out, and you're just behaving like two *cats*!" said I, ending in a wild burst of wrath and stamping my foot.

Well, I must say the girls took it very nicely; they apologised and seemed very sorry, and a better feeling began from that evening onwards. Under the crust of social prejudice and spoilt daughter self-importance, with which those two started their professional career, lay warm hearts and nice natures; they were really good at heart, and, when the tour came to an end, I was almost more sorry to say goodbye to "The Twins"

than to any other members of the company. We parted real good friends, and I hope if they ever come across these lines that they will forgive this account of an early squabble. A storm sometimes clears the air, and it certainly did in this case.

We were gradually working north, and, after being "on the road" for two or three weeks, arrived in a cathedral town where we were to stay three days. Now, in that same cathedral town many of the people are very strict and object to taking "pros" as lodgers, so Belle and I had great difficulty in "settling." We traipsed about in a vain search for rooms for quite two hours, and at last, worn out, we took some "diggings" of which one of the boys had given us the address, but had spoken rather doubtfully. The house was a large one, the drawing-room dingy, but very well furnished, with piano, sofa, easy-chairs, and many looking-glasses. The landlady seemed obliging, though a dirty-looking woman, and profusely apologised for the very untidy bedroom, saying that her other lodgers had only just gone out and she hadn't had time to "clean the place up," but that she would have everything beautifully neat by evening. We tried to believe her and went off to the station cloak-room to fetch our small baggage, as it was well on in the day and we were tired and hungry. It was a long walk, so we went back by the railway "bus. When I told the driver "Mrs. Thompson's, New Street," he said contemptuously, "Oh! Thompson's!" and sniggered as he banged the door. I felt indignant, but my heart sank.

Why should he snigger?

We were somewhat reassured, however, when we re-entered our sitting-room and saw the table nicely set, and a very clean table-cloth, while an appetising

smell of cooking came from the regions below. We were both rather starved by the time the inevitable chops and potatoes made their appearance, and gobbled down our dinner in a rather greedy way, but there was no one there to see.

Then I retired to the sofa for a nap, and was so dead beat that I slept in spite of Belle banging away on the piano all the afternoon. After a cup of tea we went down to the Assembly Rooms, and the awful tales we heard from some of the company about our "digs" made us shiver! We were told that we should be eaten alive and all sorts of horrors; every one winding up with "My dear girls, you can't possibly stop there. The rooms are notorious!"

The 'busman's snigger was now accounted for, but what was to be done?

Belle was inclined to be hysterical (she was so aggravating, that girl!) and said she "would sooner sleep in the street than in that awful place!"

"Nonsense," said I, "We've no time to change with all the baggage, and we've got to stick it for the night, so just you come and help me find some rooms to go to in the morning."

Off we tramped, and this time were more successful, for after half an hour's search, we discovered an extra room in a nice, clean house where some of the other girls were staying, and made arrangements to go round early the following day.

By this time it was getting quite late, and we had to make a rush in order to be in time for the show. Young Tommy Hunt, who had given us the address of our present "diggings," was very penitent, and promised to come round early and back us up in case there was a row at our leaving.

We got back to our lodgings rather late, and made our supper of bread and cheese, for we didn't dare to have anything cooked after the tales we had been hearing of our present quarters.

When we went upstairs, we found the bedroom in exactly the same state as when we had seen it early in the day. There were very grimy-looking sheets in the big mahogany four-poster, but clean pillow-cases had been slipped on to the pillows. So we removed these from underneath the gruesome damask hangings to the foot of the bed, and tucked the latter up all tight and flat. Then from her big "pilgrim" basket Belle produced a quantity of candles (we had soon learnt never to travel without candles and matches), and stuck them all round the room, on the mantelpiece, in the soap-dish, and the wash-hand basin, and wherever we could find a safe and vacant place, and we lit up the whole lot, as we had been told at the theatre that a big light would frighten away vermin as it will wild animals.

Then, dressed as we were and quite worn out with worry and fatigue, we lay down in fear and trembling upon that awful bed, to seek, if it were possible, some snatches of sleep. Little came to us, however, and we got up very early to make our toilet as best we could, for we were afraid to put anything down on table, chair, or floor, as the early morning sun pouring in, showed up in all its filthy horror that terrible room.

The dirt beggars description !

After Belle had gone downstairs I turned back the top mattress out of morbid curiosity, and the entomological scene laid bare to view fairly made me shiver.

I didn't dare to tell my companion, but declined

to have any breakfast—I could not eat again in that house.

Tommy Hunt, true to his word came round quite early and brought one of the other boys to help carry our things. He suggested we should have received a telegram recalling us suddenly to town, but I said, “No, I’m going to tell that old woman the truth,” and I did.

Going outside the door I called her up and spoke to her on the landing.

“Mrs. Thompson,” said I, “here is your money for last night, and we’re going to leave and wish to do so quietly, for we can’t stand the dirt.”

“Can’t you?” she asked, apparently in great surprise.

“No,” I said, “you must be aware of it, and no doubt are accustomed to people leaving suddenly in this way.”

“Oh dear no!” she replied with an innocent air. “Nobody ever left before”—and raising the corner of her indescribably dirty apron to her tinker-like face, she wiped away some imaginary tears.

But she was evidently used to it, for she made no fuss, and, the boys carrying the heavy bags, we went on our way rejoicing. I had never been accustomed to think of myself as a brave person, yet sometimes think I developed a sort of vixenish courage upon that tour. But it was often absolutely necessary that some one should “face the music,” and Belle simply couldn’t or wouldn’t, so although she was the largest woman in the whole company, and I the very smallest, she soon came to lean upon me in quite a ridiculous way, though she often had great rows with me on her own account.

The weather now was perfect, and we thoroughly enjoyed the remainder of our stay in that town, as we

roamed over castle and cathedral and along the river side.

One afternoon young Tommy gave a most successful party, as it was his birthday. He was living in a charming cottage just outside the town, and from the lovely, old-fashioned garden, where we enjoyed a sumptuous tea, one got a glorious view of all the country round.

About a dozen of the company were present—Tommy's special friends—all got up "regardless of expense," and everything was so absolutely correct, that Mr. Cobb remarked, "It's just like a vicarage garden-party! I can't believe we're on a 'Fit-up.'"

At the Assembly Rooms we drew big houses every night, and by this time we were all well accustomed to our work and to each other. Such a jolly company we were, just like a big family. All my shyness had worn off, and I was getting quite popular among both men and girls; they said I was "amusing," and in spite of the inevitable discomforts of the tour, I was beginning to thoroughly enjoy the whole thing.

The keen air, the constant change of scene and the professional life as a whole, suited me down to the ground, and our appetites troubled Belle and myself not a little, for it used to cost us so much to live. Our fare was extremely simple, but I found that "Fit-up" far more expensive than I have done the ordinary theatre tours. One had to be continually buying things in small quantities, and it was such a nuisance to carry things on that we often succumbed to the temptation of leaving them behind us. Then, too, the wear and tear of our clothes was very great, the expense of boots and gloves especially.

A good many of our men wore shooting costumes,

and for the girls the only sensible things were a sailor hat, and coat and skirt. But every woman likes to look nice sometimes, and one of us would occasionally don a pretty gown or flower-trimmed hat, at the imminent risk of getting it drenched before the day was out.

But what mattered that ?

One's clothes might as well get spoilt upon one's back as by being crushed and tossed and tumbled in a trunk, in which, however often you set the contents to rights, the one article you needed of all others was sure to be hidden away in the very lowest depths. Then, pressed for time, you fished wildly for the thing wanted, and finding it at last, tossed the other clothing back anyhow and hastily jammed down the lid, the result next time you could get a chance of opening your box being something appalling.

I started my theatrical career with a brand-new tin trunk, at which Norris, the baggage-man, looked in great disapproval when I first delivered it into his charge.

"'Adn't yer got a basket, Miss ?" said he. "This 'ere trunk won't last long on a 'Fit-up' !" and he was right.

It held out for several weeks, gradually getting dented, banged and knocked about by the almost daily travel, till it was nearly past recognition, save for the "R. Roupell" painted in large white letters across the front. When at last the lock got wrenched off for the second time, and the lid being bashed in, all my private goods and chattels were in imminent danger of being exposed to the public eye and getting lost *en route*, I took Norris's advice and sent down to a Bradford firm for a small theatre basket, which duly arrived in a day or

two. It was strongly made, clamped with iron at each corner, and boasted a big, strong padlock, and I rejoiced exceedingly, as I spent my Saturday afternoon in the theatre dressing-room, picking and choosing the necessary articles of dress I must have with me and transferring them to the jolly little basket, while with scarcely a sigh, I packed most of my finery into the battered tin trunk which Norris had promised me to send safely home to London, and felt that I was gradually leaving the amateur stage behind me.

CHAPTER III

"ON THE ROAD"

WE were constantly now doing one-night stands, and played at some charming, quaint little towns in Northumberland.

I well remember one Sunday afternoon at a little place not far from the border, wandering about alone on the wild moorland, and then perching on a stile, to sit for an hour or more gazing at the scenery and the wonderful colours over-head.

How I loved those Northern skies !

The colours were cold, but to an artistic eye the way in which the white would shade into palest grey, then a faint blue, and underlying all a deep but misty purple-grey splashed with fleecy little white clouds, was a thing to make one dream ! The little towns, too, were so quaint with their old, stone-fronted cottages and red-tiled roofs. I used to get bewildered with the narrow, winding lanes all paved with smooth cobble stones, and lose my way in the old market places with their many entrances. It seemed to me that the country Northumbrians spoke with a strong German accent. Several of us remarked it, and found it far more difficult to understand than the Scottish dialect.

Belle Sylvester was very popular with some of the

boys, and one or other was always dangling after her. Thus it came to pass that while she always managed to get away early—she was a remarkably quick dresser—and had an escort home, I went off alone every night after the show for quite two months or more when, as she had quarrelled with all her admirers in turn, she used to wait for me, and after that we always went home together for the rest of the tour.

In many of those out-of-the-way places, it wasn't very nice for a girl to be out late alone, but I must do the male portion of our company the justice to say that I don't think any of them knew I had nobody with me, and I was far too proud and independent to mention it, lest any one should think I was "fishing" for an escort.

I had some terrible scares as I scuttled along the dark and lonely roads and up the narrow closes like a frightened hare! What I dreaded most was losing my way, for in those one-night towns we were unavoidably often far away from the theatre, and sometimes I found it impossible to remember the several turnings I had to take in order to get to our rooms. Again and again late at night, I have been compelled to go up to some man and ask my way to my "diggings," frightened out of my wits lest he should direct me wrongly, but having so utterly lost my bearings that I couldn't have got back without directions. At many of the halls there was a list of professional lodgings kept, but there were never nearly enough for our company, and they were usually snatched up by the men before the girls got an innings.

I believe it is customary in some "Fit-up" companies for the ladies, if possible, to be suited with lodgings before the men. It is certainly easier for the latter to make shift than inexperienced girls, but in *The Days*

of *Nero* Company, there was no favour shown to the weaker sex in any way whatever.

Our managers never troubled their heads about any of us keeping the usual rule of leaving our addresses at the theatre when we had "settled." It was simply null and void with the single exception of the week we spent at Greenock, and I have sometimes wondered if any of the girls had suddenly disappeared, whether any one would ever have known what had become of them! If one or two had not turned up at the railway station, it would simply have been taken for granted that they had missed the train, as sometimes happened, and that they would come on later in the day. Probably, however, the risks were far less than at the time they appeared to a girl brought up in London with its lights, and bustle and crowds of people.

Just before we crossed the border we had another most unfortunate experience with regard to rooms, but of quite a different kind to the last.

We arrived in our town about midday on a Saturday, and a good many of the company had been lucky enough to secure rooms beforehand, but for the others! Oh, the hunt!

Sylvester and I walked about in pouring rain for two hours or more before we could get anything suitable, but finally coming across Tommy Hunt, he got us, as we thought, most comfortably settled at a small tavern in the market-place. For a wonder, however, we forgot to mention that we belonged to *The Days of Nero* Company, as we usually did. The landlady seemed very nice, and said she would much prefer us to buy our things to finding board, and she would cook for us. Off we went to the hall (a Corn Exchange this time and we had to dress in the corn-bins), to send our small

baggage across, and then I set out to do all the catering for Sunday. I bought a nice little piece of lamb and had some vegetables sent—potatoes, beans, tomatoes, a melon, and also groceries, tea, butter, &c.

This took some time and trouble, and afterwards I went back to the Corn Exchange for something or other. There I found Sylvester and we returned together to our inn, anticipating the tea which the cheerful landlady had promised to get for us. We bought some cold meat on the way, for we were very hungry and nearly dead with fatigue.

To our surprise, a man, apparently the landlord, met us in the passage and said, "We can't do anything for you here—you'll have to go, the child's taken very ill and my missus can't attend to anybody."

We were thunderstruck!

"Why, where are we to go?" we said. "It's so late, and all the rooms are taken."

"Can't help that," said the man in a surly tone, "you can't stop *here*."

We looked at each other in despair, but turned out into the rain and began to search once more. All the private lodgings were taken long before—they were very scarce and difficult to get, and the Temperance Hotel was crowded with our people. We tried six or seven other inns and taverns, indeed every one in the place, only to meet everywhere with the same refusal. Once or twice I heard whispered consultations behind the bars and then some nasty woman saying decidedly, "I'm not goin' to have 'em *here*," when I was convinced they had empty rooms.

Finally we went back to the Corn Exchange, and on the way met Mr. Blane to whom we poured forth our woes. He played the gaol governor in a big, barn-

storming manner, and had a most terrific temper. He said he would come across and see what he could do for us ; perhaps if we paid in advance the people would keep us, as they might have been frightened by former experiences. He told us the people in these little towns were frequently "done" by actors from common shows who were thoroughly low, and lived sometimes all together, men and women, "like rabbits in a hutch," so that when they got a respectable company they couldn't tell the difference. Back we all set and interviewed our refractory landlord, but it was of no avail. He kept on saying sullenly that the child was ill and his wife out. Out ! Why, I caught sight of her disappearing round a corner as we entered, and she kept peeping out of the kitchen at the back and closing the door quickly if we looked round ! She had discovered we were actresses, consequently thought we *must* be disreputable. I found afterwards she had been talking to Belle about her jewellery, asking where she had got her rings, and insinuating horrid things about us both.

Blane soon lost his temper and gave the man an awful rowing, said he should report the inn both to our stage-manager and the police, and that he would do all he could to spoil the licence, because they had no right to let us rooms and then turn us out. It was of no use, however. It was getting frightfully late and it was absolutely necessary to find a night's lodging *somewhere*.

At last Blane said to me, "Come on, Miss Roupell, you must get out of this anyhow !" and he dashed upstairs to the sitting-room to fetch our things. Sylvester had disappeared some time before, and having dragged her heavy "pilgrim" basket down to the passage, had walked off to get a boy to fetch it. Probably she had bumped it down from stair to stair ; it was a fearful weight, for

Belle used to pack the contents of a small trunk into that basket, and from its thin rush sides was oozing a dark liquid which had trickled in a frothy stream from the bottom of the stairs right along to the private door.

I was too distressed at the time to take much notice, though by and by I was destined to find out what had caused the mischief.

Up I ran after Blane, and at the head of the staircase found to my dismay my nice new string-bag (one made with large open meshes), dumped down on the floor and filled with fruit and vegetables, potatoes, beans, melon, tomatoes, and the rest all in a dirty jumble !

On the parlour table were lying all the other stores, tea, butter, a pot of jam, cheese, &c., all in little paper parcels. Blane stuffed them into his pockets and snatched up my heavy Gladstone bag.

"I shan't take the bread," said I, more than half inclined to cry. "I can't carry any more."

"Then *they* shan't have it," said our Roman gaoler savagely ; "they shan't have a single *thing* !" and he caught the loaf off the table, threw it on the floor, and stamped on it with heavy, muddy boots till it was a dirty mass ! I burst out laughing in the midst of my distress. Blane was always in such desperate earnest.

Off he rushed downstairs, while I followed laden with my golf-cloak, umbrella, and the heavy bag of vegetables. I felt such a wretched, little greengrocer boy, and hurried along to the Corn Exchange in a very shamefaced way !

Here we deposited all the baggage, and set off again to look for rooms. I told Blane I knew of a place close by at some Refreshment Rooms, but the terms were so shockingly high we really couldn't afford to pay them. He said, "Never mind—you *must* get settled, it's so late,

so just pay whatever they ask." Sylvester and I took his advice, as the landlady came down in her price to exactly half that she had asked in the morning, when she demanded £1 for two nights for one bedroom, use of sitting-room and attendance. Finding at last, however, that nobody in our company could or would pay so much and fearing her rooms would be empty, she consented to take us for 10s., and certainly we were most comfortable.

While the landlady was getting us some tea in a great hurry—we were nearly due at the hall, but were simply starving—Belle went across the room to take the hand-straps off her basket and started back in dismay.

"Why, whatever is all this mess?" she cried, examining the damp sticky sides, and then hastily wrenching off the top. "Oh! Oh!! O—O—O—Oh!!! Rosie, you wretch! You *wretch*! It's every bit your fault! What on earth shall I *do* with it?"

I ran across to see what was the matter. Poor Belle! I was sorry for her beyond the power of any words to express. Her beautiful pink silk dress, smothered in lace and chiffon, the pride of her heart and the apple of her eye, lay a crushed brown wet mass just inside the basket, while the burst bottle of stout that had done the damage, lay bottom upwards trickling its very last drops on to the new white kid gloves which Belle had designed to wear on promenade and to church the following day!

I did not say she should have packed her things more carefully. I did not say she shouldn't have bumped her basket down the inn staircase. I didn't ask her why she travelled in an expensive silk dress at all on a "Fit-up" tour and in a rush hand-basket. No! I nobly held my tongue and let Sylvester rave in

wild despair, for it was *I* who, with thrifty soul, had said it was a shame to leave a bottle of Guinness behind, and induced poor Belle to take it on! And all that evening, and next day too, I felt the most abject little criminal on the face of the earth!

I gulped down a cup of tea, stuffed a piece of bread and butter into my mouth and disappeared. My walking was not yet done, for on calling at the butcher's shortly before, I found that our piece of lamb had been sent by mistake to an inn at the very other end of the town, and I wasn't going to give it up without a struggle! At the imminent risk of being "off" the first scene I secured our Sunday joint, and dashed into the hall a quarter of an hour before we rang up!

Sylvester and I were so worn out that we quarrelled every time we met that evening in our corn-bin, but we made it up next morning, and had such a happy Sunday after all our troubles!

The weather was gloriously fine after the rain, and we thoroughly appreciated the Day of Rest. In the evening several of the company went out of curiosity to hear a sermon on our play, *The Days of Nero*, preached at a small Methodist Chapel, and we all felt a little bit ashamed of our motive, for it was a splendid sermon, broad-minded, large-hearted, and the preacher a thoroughly cultured man. He hurried down the aisle after service to shake hands with us, for the strangers were quickly "spotted" by minister and congregation, and we all thanked him for his sermon and told him how much we appreciated it.

Next morning while on our railway journey, Mr. Andrews poked his head out of the carriage window and called, "Look out, ladies, we are just passing

Gretna Green!" A minute afterwards and we were fairly across the border.

As soon as we reached Scotland, we were again able to travel in comfort, and could usually secure a corridor car until we got still farther North. Latterly we had had a good deal of discomfort *en route*, had been obliged to shift anyhow, get into dirty smoking-carriages and crowd together for quite long journeys.

Going across country we sometimes had one or two long stoppages, for though we could often now keep the same special carriages for two or three weeks, they were usually coupled on to one of the ordinary trains, and we were constantly shunted about from train to train and line to line, so that what was in reality a short distance would occasionally take several hours to accomplish.

For the first time in my life I felt I could enter with deep sympathy into the feelings of the unfortunate specimens at the Zoo, for we were a constant source of curiosity to the country folk. It took some of us quite a long time to grow accustomed to those broad peasant faces that flattened against the window panes (mouths agape and showing much gum), stared at us with goggling eyes exactly as if we had been wild beasts in a cage. It was sometimes also very difficult to make the people understand that our carriages were reserved for the company, and occasionally on a market or excursion day, when there was a rush of villagers on the platform at some small wayside station, we had quite a struggle to keep them out. A fat, old peasant woman would be wildly tugging at the handle trying to get the door open, and Miss Delorme, with lithe, sinewy fingers, muscular from much tennis and piano playing, would keep it firmly shut from the inside, while some-

body remarked, "My good woman, this carriage is *reserved*, don't you understand? It's *reserved*," and point out *The Days of Nero* label to the expostulating old lady who didn't seem to understand why we objected to her company.

Some of our boys—mischievous as boys always are—would thoroughly enjoy it if the doors happened to be locked, and with great politeness would say to the angry passengers, "Pull—pull—you don't pull hard enough," till at last the unhappy individuals on the platform gave up the contest in despair and rushed off to find another carriage.

Some funny *contretemps* sometimes occurred at the different little towns.

Once we were playing on an extremely small stage, and it was almost impossible to crowd all the people on in the Forest Scene. As the Roman soldiers came rushing on, one of the Christians suddenly struck down, rolled over towards the footlights, and when a minute later the curtain descended, she was lying right outside it.

Mr. Rossiter and Cobb were both very angry, for the curtain had to be raised some way to enable the poor dead Christian to crawl back and take her place along with the other corpses, while the audience yelled with laughter. After that we were told that in future "any one dying outside the curtain would be fined half a crown."

Then there was constant trouble about the bugle call. Two or three times in the final scene, where the Christian martyrs are sent to the lions, a music cue had to be given at the wings every time the gates of the arena were supposed to be opened. In every town we were obliged to get a fresh trumpeter to

learn the simple signal, of which the rhythm ran thus :—

Ta-ran-Ta-Ran-Ta-Ran-Ta-Ra !

Sometimes those calls were weird indeed, but one night we happened to light on a man who in bygone days had played the post-horn on a Richmond coach. He had been all right at rehearsal, but at night thought he would give his music an airing and struck up the dinner-call ! On and on went the cornet in elaborate twirls and turns, while Rossiter at the wings opposite gesticulated wildly to Cobb to stop the man ; poor Cobb, who was working the limelight, and for a few seconds could not leave it, stamped in fury, and all the Christians doubled up in their robes nearly dying with laughter, and had to stop singing the anthem as they went off because they were so convulsed.

After that experience, Mr. Rossiter—so it leaked out—offered to pay Marconi several shillings a week extra if he would get a cornet and learn the trumpet-call, and for some weeks afterwards whenever in the day time one entered the theatre, there were most doleful wailing sounds proceeding from the men's dressing rooms, which were accounted for by Marconi's practising.

I shall never forget his first experiment on the stage ! It was a sort of Banshee wail, and worse than the dinner-call by a long way, though this time we didn't dare laugh, we had caught it so before and were afraid we should be fined.

Mr. Rossiter had to put Marconi back for a fortnight and still engage a stranger. At the end of that time, Marconi played the call till the end of the tour, but it was often a kind of a dismal ~~howl~~ ^{howl} that tried one's self-control not a little.

At North Berwick, Sylvester and I shared two combined rooms with Misses Delorme and Gray, both of whom had improved very much under the influence of our free-and-easy style of life, and the mutual helpfulness which is rapidly developed among the women in a nice company. Indeed the starchiness and conventional nonsense of "The Twins" was fast becoming a thing of the past; the best side of both was completely uppermost and they were now very friendly with all the other girls.

Up to the present Belle and I had been able, except in a few instances, to get a sitting-room and bedroom, but we were beginning now to find this often impossible, as in many places only quite poor people would take us in.

We were located in a small "close" or alley, and up a dark, narrow, breakneck staircase, which had a big hole in one of its wooden steps, that was a regular trap to the unwary. Our landlady, however, an enormously stout fishwife, who gained her living chiefly out-of-doors by selling Finnan "haddies," told us she would "leave a licht burnin' at the stairheid the nicht," for she lived on the other side of the landing, and we had to take a huge doorkey with us when we went to the theatre. We four girls agreed to pay 6s. for the accommodation, and our fishwife informed us we had got the rooms "vara cheap." We found the rates in the different towns varied a little, but usually now paid 1s. a night each, or with a fire 1s. 3d.; sometimes as above, we had to pay 1s. 6d., and occasionally even 2s. The people had a great dislike to letting rooms to one person, as if we were two together it gave little more trouble and meant double money.

We arrived in the middle of the morning, and there

was some discussion about dinner, as our old fishwife stoutly refused to do anything whatever for us except light a fire in the small open range.

The room which Belle and I shared was a kitchen with a double bed placed against the wall. There were various utensils about, plates, saucepans, &c., and our landlady informed us we could have the use of everything. I was the only one who could cook, and said if the others would do the catering I would undertake to dish up a dinner. So the three girls went off into the rain—we had continuous rain for two or three weeks—and I flung myself on the bed, for I felt done up and had the faceache. While I was watching the fire slowly burning up in the damp, smoky range, there came a loud, single knock at the door. Up I jumped and opened it, and a man with a sack on his back simply uttering the word, "Coals!" pushed past me into the room, lifted the lid of what I had thought was a cupboard near the bed, and shot the contents of his sack into the bunker. A cloud of coal dust arose and smothered everything, but the man marched off in the same cool way he had entered, and by the time I, much annoyed, had dusted the room, my fellow-lodgers returned with steak and vegetables, and other provisions. Then they all sat round the fireplace and, greatly interested, watched my operations, which resulted in a tolerable meal after a long time, for the fire *wouldn't* burn, and the plates *wouldn't* heat, and the saucepans were much too large. I was obliged to cook our modest piece of steak in a most extraordinary frying-pan of huge dimensions, with a big spout and a handle over the top like a tea-kettle. I had to tip it up and make the gravy in one corner, and much regretted my rash promise to provide tomato

sauce, but got it done after a rough-and-ready fashion.

We dined in the apartment occupied by "The Twins," which was a small room opening out of our kitchen. We had a great hunt for knives and forks, and only succeeded in mustering three pairs among four people. Here and throughout our small cottage "diggings" we were obliged to use the old-fashioned two- or three-pronged steel forks, and it was quite a work of art to learn to manipulate them. Our salt-cellar was the top of Belle's vaseline jar. It was a jolly enough meal, however, and we had great fun, though we were obliged to do our own washing-up at a small sink outside the door, keeping an enormous tea-kettle on the fire all the time in order to get hot water.

The heavy rain kept us indoors all day, though good-natured Ethel Gray insisted on going out to get me some camphorated oil with which to rub my face, for it was steadily swelling, so that by the time we had to go to the Hall I was a most unsightly object and in great pain.

We had a crowded house and quite an aristocratic audience. A well-known member of the Cabinet sat almost in the front row, and several "swells" were with him. After the show, there was quite a string of carriages outside.

I was feeling miserable, for it was agony to sing, and was most thankful to get back to our shabby "diggings" :—"Home, home, there's no place like home," even if it be a kitchen in a slum, when one is ill, and what I felt a great piece of comfort was that, having command of the coal bunker, I could keep the fire in. I found it, however, quite impossible to sleep, though Sylvester was peacefully reposing at my side, and

presently I got up on an insect hunt—as usual in nearly all these lodgings. I slid out of the bed—it was so high that I was obliged to mount upon a chair to get into it and kept fearing I should tumble out—and slipped my feet into the warm, knitted wool slippers I always carried in my bag, and which were often the greatest comfort.

What was the matter with them? They were sopping wet! It puzzled me not a little, but I stood them on the hob to dry. It seemed to me that my face would be more bearable if I were sitting by the fire, so I went to fetch my cloak hanging up behind the door. I took a few steps with bare feet and flopped right into a big pool of cold water!

Then it dawned upon my brain that after I had betaken myself to bed, when we had returned from the theatre, Sylvester had tried to have a bath in a hand-basin! She had scarcely made any attempt to wipe up the water, which stood in pools all over the oil-cloth, and then she had evidently paddled around in my shoes! She was wideawake now and complaining of my disturbing her. I was in very great pain and awfully angry, and we *did* have a row! We frightened the girls in the other room out of their wits (so they told us some weeks afterwards), for we went at it “hammer and tongs,” finally agreeing to part next morning.

Our train call was 8 o'clock, and we had to be up at 6.30; but Sylvester stalked off without any breakfast and never spoke to me. I couldn't stand that, for I was fond of her after a fashion, so we made it up at the railway station and continued to muddle along in the same old way, week in, week out, like the husband and wife of the comic papers!

CHAPTER IV

OUR GENTLEMEN AND OTHER PEOPLE

THERE wasn't much sentiment in our crowd, though there was a good deal of *camaraderie*, quite a different thing.

A thoroughly healthy tone prevailed, and considering that the company chiefly consisted of young, unmarried people, there were wonderfully few love affairs and flirtations. Perhaps the well-known fact that Dan Drake had the greatest objection to engagements (matrimonial ones) in his companies, had something to do with it ; for if such a thing took place the odds were that, within a very short time, one or other of the pair would be drafted into another company. He took a fatherly interest in all his "crowds," and most of his people liked "old D. D.," as he was frequently called.

There was the usual contingent of ladies in love with the actor-manager. Nothing very wonderful in this case, for Mr. Rossiter was a well-grown, good-looking, and agreeable man ; but his heart was stony—as far as the tender passion was concerned.

Mr. Andrews, our business-manager, had been engaged for some time to a pretty little girl, who was playing Molly Seymour in a *Geisha* Company down

in the south of England, and was so sincerely fond of her that he didn't flirt.

Mr. Cobb, often known as "Uncle Dick," and to the men as "Dicky," professed himself a "woman-hater," which I always greatly doubted, and there was a time—ah, well, never mind, Uncle Dick!—it's a good while now since you and I played together in *The Days of Nero*, but you were pretty good to *me* if you *were* a "woman-hater"; it was a convenient Shibboleth at any rate. This disposed of the managers.

Then there was handsome Mr. Parry, who for weeks used to bring Gladys Vane a good-sized box of chocolates regularly every day, and take her for walks when she would go, which wasn't often—for she didn't like him, though she ate his chocolates.

Alfred Blane had recently had "a disappointment," which was supposed to account for his moroseness, melodramatic attitudes, and gloomy despair, but he certainly looked as if he suffered with his liver.

Mr. Groves had very bad health, and took little interest in anything off the stage except golf. He was a good-looking man with "an air," and a fine actor. He had been a long time on the boards, and had constantly played in London houses and first-rate companies, but was so uncertain owing to his weak health that he could no longer be depended upon for difficult parts. You never knew when he would be "off." I heard him say once in a bitter, quiet voice—he was always quiet—"I've been twelve years in the profession, and I've arrived at playing Claudius in a 'Fit-up.'"

Poor Groves! He was a thorough gentleman and a most pathetic figure. The tour tried him terribly, and was altogether beyond his strength.

We were all fond of Nero, *alias* "Pa," who was one

of the nicest men in the company, and very popular with both men and girls.

I have an indistinct notion that some one told me he had been passionately in love with a wife who had lived quite a short time ; at any rate, I'm sure he was a widower, and on more than one occasion I have seen quite a pained look on his face when he was being chaffed about getting married, though, in a general way, he would take any amount of teasing in the most good-tempered manner possible.

Nero was a stout, broad-shouldered man, and used to say that he was much younger than he looked ; but having always played "old men," he was sure the parts had affected his looks, his bearing, and his character.

Nobody knew much about Marconi, the chorus master. I heard he'd got a wife tucked away somewhere, but hadn't much faith in the tale. He was very deep. I couldn't stand his eyes, nor the way he would watch some of the girls when he thought nobody was looking ; and I hated his hard, white teeth—they were so aggressively false and Carker-like. He and I were antipathetic from the first, though always outwardly polite to each other.

I think these were all the older men in the company. Then came the "boys," of whom there were several.

Tommy Hunt, a smart young actor, good-natured, quick-tempered, volatile, and greatly given to flirting.

Mr. Powell, son of a deceased baronet and army man. This young gentleman adopted the artistic and æsthetic pose, and aggravated most of the girls very much. Strangely enough, he possessed a great attraction for pretty, down-right, jolly little Grace Barker. There was soon an "understanding" between them, if not a positive engagement, and he would allow her to

show him little attentions and make him little presents with an indolent grace which she seemed to enjoy, but which greatly annoyed the rest of us. These two were continually about together for the first few weeks, and then Mr. Rossiter told them very kindly that they mustn't be seen so much in company, because they knew what an objection Drake had to anything of the kind in his "crowds," and he feared if they continued to be so conspicuous, it would end in one or the other being sent away. So it was arranged that Powell might take Grace home every night after the show, and go to tea occasionally with her and the two girls with whom she "chummed," and with this the couple had to be content.

Then there was dear Bertie Verschoyle, a very nice boy. It was whispered that he was heir to an earldom, and he had the unmistakable cut of a public-school boy or under-grad. I really think, however, that beyond his own attractions—and they were many—it must have been the whisper of the title which accounted for the way two girls much older than himself paid him court, as well as some of the younger ones.

But he was wily, though quite young, and took good care to keep out of all serious entanglements. He was a very clever boy, and ought some day to make a name, because he didn't mind work and was pleasant to get on with.

Philip Maunder was a tall, fine-looking fellow of one or two-and-twenty—nearly all our men were tall. He had a handsome face and a discontented mind, and was always grumbling at his part. I afterwards played with him in another company, and have also met him on several occasions since, and it is always the same tale. His part isn't good enough, his talents are

unrecognised, and he wants to go right to the top of the tree without the work and indomitable patience necessary to get there. He was a canny Scotsman, and used to say that he would never marry unless the girl had money ; scarcely a nice sentiment for so young a man, as I told him, but he and I always squabbled whenever we met.

Last, but certainly not least, came John Flanders, whom I can only describe by saying that he was a big fool—in every sense of the adjective. Six feet two in his stockings, with a big voice, bigger features, and the biggest feet. A most gigantic appetite, too ! I knew because on more than one occasion Belle and I happened to get into the same diggings with him and his chum, and were obliged to use the same sitting-room. When this was the case, we found it more convenient to board together, and it usually fell to my lot to do the catering. So as we always shared the bill on equal terms, Flanders's appetite was a grief to my just and thrifty soul. He was very fond of trying to tease me, and would sometimes stop me in the street, burst into a great hoarse laugh, and pointing to the big plume of feathers in the velvet "Tam-O'Shanter" that I loved to wear, say, "Well, 'Cock-o'-the-North,' have you snatched any digs this morning ? Ho ! ho !"

I said to him once when he was making some idiotic joke as usual at my lack of stature, "Good lord, man ! You seem to think your size is a merit ! I'd rather have my brains than your inches any day !" He didn't like it, and told some of the company that "little Roupell had confounded cheek."

Then there was the working staff, and what a fine staff ours was ! It consisted of Mrs. Dighton, the

wardrobe-mistress, two carpenters and Norris, who, in addition to being baggage-man, was also "General Utility." Shortly before the tour ended, I heard two of the managers who were comparing notes, say that they had never had such a good staff before. Up early and down late, worn out with hard physical labour and the wear and tear of the constant travel, and not infrequently being obliged to sleep in the hall or dressing-room through lack of "digs"—the staff had little time to go a-hunting like the rest of us—but always cheerful, always steady, and always energetic.

I liked Norris, and he would usually do anything he could for me, though he was rather a perverse little man, and loved to object to things.

When we began to do one-night stands, all the small-part people were told that they could only have their private baskets up at the theatre once a week, the rest of the time they would be left on the truck at the railway station, and that Mrs. Dighton would pack our "make-up" and "properties." This order caused much wailing among the girls ; it was so difficult to pack all we needed into a hand-bag or rush-basket, and we used to try and cajole Norris into letting us have our baskets occasionally during the week, but it was difficult work to get round the little man ! When we saw the lorry coming up from the station with all the baskets on it, how we used to run round it, and try to see if our special trunk or basket was piled among the others. They weighed two tons altogether Norris told me, and sometimes when he couldn't get a man to help, I've known him take the whole lot, one after another, on his back up two flights of stairs or more to the dressing-rooms. The muscles of his back and sturdy, slightly bowed legs must have been as strong as iron ! In

addition to his other multifarious duties, Norris used to appear as one of the Roman Guard, of whom there were four, about as varied specimens of Britons as it is possible to find. The remaining three consisted of Philip Maunder, who played the Captain ; Brown, the under-carpenter, and old Marconi, whose tights always wrinkled down his shambly legs ! We used to call these four " The Battalion."

What I chiefly liked about Norris was his indomitable pluck. I saw him looking very unhappy one day and asked him what was the matter.

" Well, Miss Roupell, I've had the nooeralgia that bad all the week I 'avn't known 'ow to bear myself, and I aint got no understudy," said poor Norris ruefully.

It struck me as dreadfully pathetic, and on the spot I imbibed a great admiration for our uncomplaining Roman soldier. Not all the male members of the company were as patient as sturdy little Norris.

One day, walking down the high street, I came suddenly on Alfred Blane, whom I had scarcely seen off the stage for some days, and was greatly struck by his altered looks. " Why, whatever is the matter, Mr. Blane ? " I exclaimed, " You look so awfully ill ! "

" It's this damned fit-up ! That's what's the matter ! " he said savagely. " Excuse me, Miss Roupell, but it's enough to make any man swear ! Here have I been sweating away in ' Fit-ups ' for the past two years—this is my fifth, and I don't believe Drake ever means to put me into anything else, and hang it all whatever I am, I know I'm a handsome man, and I *can act* ! "

As he spoke he fell into an attitude, and lifting his hat, swept his hand with a melodramatic gesture through the masses of curly black hair that lay above his deadly pale and Jewish face.

"No," I said thoughtfully, "You're not handsome, but you're picturesque—a regular Pirate King!"

He looked rather annoyed.

"May I ask you to explain your meaning, Miss Roupell?" he asked stiffly.

"I'm not sure that I can," I answered laughing. "Many men are handsome, but few are picturesque."

"Thank you," he said more graciously, evidently gratified that I did not reckon him with the "common herd." "I am more than satisfied"; and with an elegant bow our barn-stormer crossed on the other side of the road, to kill with deadly glances a pretty little girl who was dressing the window of a small drapery shop.

With the exception of the staff, about the hardest worked man in the company was Mr. Cobb. In addition to multifarious other duties, he played "Juba," the low-comedy part, which was rather long and trying, and very funny he used to look in a scarlet tunic, embroidered with gold and jewels, and a bald wig with a wreath of roses hanging round it. He worked the limes when Norris was needed elsewhere, did all the stage-management (Rossiter seldom interfered), vigorously sang in the chorus, and had heaps of things upon his shoulders; and what a life we girls all led him, poor man! One of his duties was to lead the laughs behind the Bacchanalian Scene, and on it, too, after we revellers made our entrance, and he used to get extremely angry because some of the small-part people were so lazy with regard to the laughing. He was a most conscientious worker himself, but not at all quick-eyed, and was seldom smart enough to pitch upon the real shirkers. He used to blunder about at the back rowing the wrong people, and always

vowing he would call rehearsals for the laughs, but only one came off. Truth to tell we had little time for rehearsing as the tour went on, and Cobb's bark was worse than his bite, save in the matter of dressing-rooms, and there we girls certainly suffered.

Occasionally we played in splendid halls, and had plenty of good dressing-room accommodation, but this was most unusual, and, as a general rule, the discomfort for all the small-part people was indescribable. *The Days of Nero* was a troublesome piece to dress, necessitating tights under the classical robes and draperies, in order to cause the latter to hang gracefully. These, too, were a great deal of trouble, and needed great care if one wished to look nice.

In many places the accommodation was of the scantiest description, but although the number of men and girls was about equal, almost invariably the latter went to the wall! When there were three dressing-rooms we were put into one, and where there were only two, we always got the worst. For this Mr. Cobb got all the credit, but my eyes were gradually opened to the fact that he only acted under orders.

Mr. Rossiter was a weak man of very charming manners, and, like all weak people, he was fond of shunting disagreeable matters on to other people's shoulders. So when any one made a complaint to him he would always listen with the greatest attention, and then say most amiably, "Well, you know, I always leave these matters to Mr. Cobb. You had better speak to him," and Cobb himself was adamant. As for Andrews, the business-manager, he kept to his own province, dear little man; but though in many respects our company was thoroughly agreeable, I will and must say that from beginning to end of my first tour

one unwritten rule was most rigidly kept, and that was "ladies last," which happily is *not* the case in most companies.

The entire company—that is, the male portion—took their tone from the managers; consequently it soon came to be felt—and resented—by all the ladies, that the general idea was, "Let the girls shift—do 'em good to have the nonsense knocked out of 'em."

This is all very well to a certain extent, for I am quite aware that girls are often most troublesome to managers with their insubordination, fads and fits of temper, and fondness for going into hysterics. I am not going to say that there were no troublesome ladies amongst us, but on the whole we were pretty fair specimens, and not much given to complaints.

The wardrobe-mistress once said to me indignantly, "Miss Roupell, I've been in the profession a good many years, and in a couple of dozen companies, but I've never yet seen the ladies pushed about and sent to the wall as they are here. People talk about the Dan Drake Companies, and say they're all ladies and gentlemen in them. Well, all I've got to say is, if these are gentlemen, give me common men a dozen times over! Why, in a third-rate pantomime crowd the men would be ashamed to always take the best dressing-rooms and snatch all the diggings before the girls can get a chance to look in!"

Our juvenile lead, Miss Collier, was a sweet-tempered girl and a thorough gentlewoman. She had been on the stage about four years, but was of too amiable a disposition, if such a thing *can* be, and could not be induced to see that if she would not stand up for her own rights, she ought to do so for the sake of the others.

Miss Lefevre, our heavy leading lady, had, on the contrary, any amount of spirit and temper, but a corresponding amount of self-control. In her case, however, I believe it was a case of being unable to quarrel with her bread-and-butter—that she could not afford to make herself objectionable to the management. She was a handsome, worn-looking woman of about thirty-two, and had been a good many years in the profession. For a long time she and her husband had toured their own successful company, in which she had played leading lady, and she once told me that she had always vowed nothing on earth should ever induce her to go on a “Fit-up.” Yet here she was! Her husband dead, and two dear little children to keep and educate, were reasons sufficient surely without further explanation. How sorry I used to feel for that woman! She was not at all strong, and after a series of one-night stands would come to the station looking half dead, but never complaining, and always getting through her work in fine style at night. To me she was always most kind, as indeed were all the older “pros.”

If the leading ladies were willing to put up with the treatment meted out to the women generally, it was of course quite useless for the small-part people to complain, as several of us being amateurs or complete novices, it was quite easy for our inexperience and ignorance of professional ways to be taken advantage of. The managers never seemed at all to realise that to girls of a good class and brought up in refined homes, it was a great trial to be suddenly pitchforked into a life in which there were discomforts and fatigue that even the strongest men in the company did not find easy to bear.

To be fair, I must say that we had a pretty good time in some ways.

Mr. Rossiter was, on the whole, most pleasant and easy-going, and though Cobb blustered a good deal, he wasn't bad-tempered, so all we small-part people did pretty much as we liked both on and off the stage, and were fearfully cheeky sometimes to the managers. In fact, we often behaved like a lot of giddy school children.

In the light of later experience, however, I see that it was chiefly the youth and enthusiasm of the beginners in *The Days of Nero* crowd which enabled them to so bravely stand the tour out. We did it, every one, and I was among those members of the company who were never "off" for a single night.

CHAPTER V

THE DRESSING-ROOM

“**H**ULLO, Rosie, have you settled ?” says Sylvester eagerly, as I come into the hall.

“Yes, combined room—very good one this time.”

“Is it near ?”

“About seven or eight minutes’ walk ; not more.”

“What’s the address ?”

“Mrs. McTavish, Black Bull Lane. Have you seen the dressing-rooms ?”

“Yes ; they’re not so bad as some we’ve had, but the girls are all in one room. The men have got two of course—wretches !”

“Have any of them taken their places ?”

“Yes, Miss Lefevre and Miss Collier and Margaret. Oh, all the principals, I think.”

“Oh, very well, I shall go and see if I can’t get a corner then.”

“You needn’t. I’ve taken the window-sill already for you and me, and I’ve got a chair too.”

“Only one ! Why didn’t you try and get me another ?”

“None to be had, my dear girl ; this one has got no back to it, and it’s so rickety I’m afraid to sit in it.”

“Then I suppose I shall have to sit on the floor ?”

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter for you, midget, you're so near the floor already, but I've got such long legs that I get cramped to death if I have to sit with them all doubled up."

Sylvester hails two of the ragged, barefoot urchins peeping in at the door to come and fetch the bags which Norris has just brought up on the lorry, and I go off to have a look at our dressing-room. It has a bare floor, is rather low-pitched, and the dimensions are about 14ft. by 12ft. A long board on trestles runs right down the middle, and there are two rickety little tables placed against the wall. Three or four theatre baskets are scattered about, and there are several chairs, besides the broken-backed one secured by Belle. All the best dressing-places are taken, and names scrawled on odd bits of paper are pinned all over the room.

Mrs. Dighton, on her knees before a huge basket on the landing, is taking many bundles out, and having seen me enter, calls out, "Here's your bundle, Miss Roupell!" Each one of the small-part people packs her own dresses, tights, shoes, &c., into a wrapper every evening, and fastens it up with safety-pins.

"Mrs. Dighton," I call out, "is there a washing-place?"

Our wardrobe-mistress comes inside the room and points to a broken-spouted jug, small basin, and old tin pail on the floor in a corner—they had escaped my eye, the room being rather dark.

"Only that, Miss Roupell."

"Oh well, it's better than nothing," I say dubiously (we hadn't got a drop of water the previous night, and were obliged to clean our hands with grease); "could you give me my make-up box?"

"I can't get at it yet, Miss Roupell, but I'll put all

your things in your place presently. I suppose you're going to dress with Miss Sylvester as usual?"

I say "Yes," thank her, and go off to our humble lodging.

We are supposed to be in the theatre an hour before the rise of the curtain. Some of the girls are very punctual, some very much the reverse. You can pretty well guess the time as you approach the hall, because if you are late Norris is sure to be outside, shouting in stentorian voice, "Early door, ladies and gentlemen! Early door! This way to the hearily door! Latest London success, *The Days of Nero!* The most hinterestin' classical play ever horfered to the public!" and he sometimes rushes in to make-up as one of "The Battalion" only a few minutes before we "ring up."

The principals are always in good time, and though I am fairly early this evening, several of the ladies are half "made up" when I enter.

"Rosie, can you lend me some candles?" calls out Flossie Hare. "I've forgotten to bring any in and I haven't time to go and buy them."

"Yes, I've got a lot and so has Sylvester," I reply, as I make my way over to our window-sill, which is piled up with various odds and ends. Sylvester has been in again in the afternoon to unpack.

Miss Lefevre, our "heavy lead," looks up and smiles as I pass.

"Good evening, dear child," says Miss Collier, the other leading lady, in her soft, caressing voice; "is your cold better?"

"Oh, yes, thanks, I'm quite all right again," I answer, ending with a gasp as I stumble over something warm and fluffy by the leg of the table, and hear an ominous little "G-r-r-r!"

"Hush ! my sweetmeat," says Miss Lefevre tenderly ; "it's only Aunt Roupell. You see, I was obliged to bring Pip to the theatre this evening because my landlady is so frightened of dogs, but he will be quite good—won't you, my beautiful man ?" and the "beautiful man" gives a rather horrifying growl in response.

I open the wooden soap-box which contains "make-up," comb and brush, stage jewellery, artificial flowers, and "properties" of various kinds, extricate two candles from the jumbled mass, and take them across the room to Flossie Hare.

There is only one wretched gas jet in the middle of the room, and nearly every one to-night has to make-up by the light of candles, which, indeed, is almost invariably the case on this tour with the small-part people. They form a very considerable item in one's expenditure, those candles.

The door is opening every minute, and as there is a fire in the room, the atmosphere soon gets stifling when the whole of us are packed inside.

"Who's got some 'one and a half' ? I haven't got a scrap left. Oh, thanks, Gladys, and could you lend me some carmine two ? I tried to get some to-day, but no one keeps grease-paints in this benighted place."

"We're going to send up to Thomas's for some things next week," remarks one of "The Twins," "so if any of you girls want anything it can come in our parcel if you let us know soon."

"Thank you, dear," says Elsie McKenzie ; "I wish you would get me a stick of rose-pink and a box of 18 rouge."

"And I want a box of gipsy powder, Alice," chimes

in Sylvester, "and I think I'll have a stick of dark blue as well."

"I wish to goodness I hadn't chosen the mantel-piece," grumbles Flossie Hare. "It's perfectly suffocating and all my paints are melting fast. *Do* open the window, somebody!"

"It is open, Floss."

"Well, open it wider; throw it up at the bottom."

"Can't," says Belle; "our candles would blow right out, and besides, the small boys would come and gaze at us all."

Our dressing-room to-night is on the ground floor and faces on to a back street, so Flossie has to make the best of her very warm quarters.

"Has anybody got a comb they're not using?" asks one of "The Twins" plaintively. "Oh, how *sweet* of you, dear Miss Joyce! I assure you we've bought *six* combs already this tour, and we haven't got one left between us; they always get lost."

Our leading ladies are always nice and kind to the others when we are all packed into one room, but they are usually rather silent. It must be very trying to have such a lot of noisy girls all around them, but they are most good-natured, and there is seldom anything disagreeable among the women, though once or twice we have had rows about the dressing-places, and once Mr. Rossiter, much to his annoyance, has been called upon to settle a difference.

"I'm going to make myself a most wretched object to-night," says Belle, who has the nature of a true artiste, balancing herself gingerly on her rickety chair. She is making up as a ragged flower-girl. "Mr. Rossiter says I can do anything I like to make myself realistic," and she proceeds to turn herself into the most woe-

begone, starving, wretched-looking creature imaginable, much to the disgust of some of the girls, who like, above all things, to appear pretty.

"Now look here, girls, when you buy my flowers in that first scene, mind you take good care to return them to me afterwards. That wretch of a Norris always tries to crib them for the decorations, and I've spent a perfect fortune lately in flowers and 'props.' "

"Yes, Belle, you're quite right," chimes in Gladys Vane. "It's all very fine for Mr. Rossiter to tell me I'm to scatter flowers about the stage while I dance; why don't they *find* the flowers? That's what I want to know. I tried to get them back last night, and Norris vowed they were all his."

This veritable "Battle of Flowers" takes place nearly every evening at "the back" after the first scene, and there are frequent skirmishes between Gladys, Belle, and some of the other girls on the one side, and Norris, a single but formidable enemy, on the other. The little man is honest enough in most directions, but utterly without principle when the question of his "decorations" comes in. He is always on the lookout to seize stray artificial flowers, dropped from costume, hair, flower-basket or dancer's fingers, and with the lightning quickness of a jackdaw, instantly secretes them in order to repair damages in the wreaths which adorn walls and columns on more than one of the scenes.

"I want to know where my chair went to," says Margaret suddenly. She is sitting on a theatre-basket, as are several of the others. "I had a chair this morning and turned it up over my dressing-place and this evening it had disappeared."

Miss Joyce turns round eagerly. "Why that must

be the one I saw young Hunt carrying along the passage this afternoon. I wondered where he got it. What a sneak ! ”

A pretty girl with short, curly hair, who is making up as a boy, suddenly bounces up from her chair, “Heavens ! I’ve no tights ! I sent my dirty ones off in the washing-basket last night and quite forgot to get any clean ones out.”

“Perhaps I can go and get them if you’ll give me your keys,” says Elsie McKenzie. “I can put on a dressing-gown and slip along the passage.”

“No, you can’t, Elsie ! It’s quite hopeless ! Norris told me he’d got to pack the rest of the baskets away in the cellar to-day because the passages were so narrow. Oh, what shall I do ? What on *earth* shall I do ? ”

“Well, I’ve got a clean pair in my bundle,” I say hesitatingly. “You and I take the same size you know, but they’re rather a queer colour.”

“Oh, never mind,” says Grace impatiently, “hand them over, Rosie, for goodness sake ! You’re my salvation ! Any of the rest of you could go on without tights at a pinch but I simply can’t ”—which is true, because Grace has to wear a short tunic while the rest of the girls have flowing robes.

Her face lengthens as I hand over the fleshings.

“Why, they’re orange ! ” she exclaims.

“Yes ; you see I got my landlady to wash them at Stranraer, and asked her to dolly-dye them pink because they were so white, and she did them too dark. I’ve been meaning to soak the colour out.”

“Well, it’s no use, I’ve got to wear them,” says Grace mournfully, and though we are all sorry for her, it’s impossible to help laughing at the streaky, orange-

coloured legs which presently appear between the short brown tunic and the sandals laced right up to the knee. They have certainly not the look of a natural skin.

"Has the half-hour been called yet?" says Pansy, the dreamer.

There is a chorus of exclamation.

"Half-hour! Good gracious! The *quarter* was called *ever* so long ago! You'd better look sharp!"

Pansy, who has to "super" on more than one scene, although she play's Nero's consort, looks round in a bewildered way. Her dressing-gown has slipped off, and Pansy in her tights is a very funny sight. With her velvety eyes and beautiful, square face, so curiously like the flower from which she takes her nickname, and with her remarkably thin lower extremities, she is, indeed, just like a pansy on its stalk—two stalks, in fact.

One of the girls, who is quite ready to go on, helps poor Pansy to don her silk gown and draperies, and when Norris gives a fearful thump at the door, and shouts, "Hoverture and beginners, please!" she only has to slip on her necklace and pin some artificial roses in the dark hair rolling down her back, and confined with a fillet across the forehead. After the first scene, "The Twins," who have a quick change, fling their silk gowns on the floor, and rushing into slave dresses, they hastily tie their red silk sashes as they scamper along the passage. Most of us, however, have a long wait, and there is much general conversation and many whispered talks.

"Flossie," said Gladys mysteriously, "you know you missed a grease-towel the other night?"

"Yes," says Flossie breathlessly.

"Well, you just go and look at that towel hanging

over the back of May Joyce's chair. I think you'll find your name in the corner."

Flossie goes and snatches up the towel, brings it away, and holds an indignant conversation on the subject with Gladys Vane until Miss Joyce returns.

"Who has taken my towel?" says this lady rather nervously.

"Oh, you must have packed up one of mine by mistake," says Flossie Hare with dangerous politeness, and Miss Joyce murmurs something which *may* or *may not* be an apology, as she subsides into her chair at the centre table.

The door flies open and in bounces Grace Barker, who is just "off" her first scene. This little lady has the making of a very clever actress, and possesses a beautiful voice, but at present she is still a bit of a tomboy.

"There's a boy outside I'm going to send for some tarts," she says hurriedly. "Do any of you other girls want anything?"

"Oh, yes, we'll have some chocolate," call out "The Twins," who have just returned. "And let him get me a jam-puff," says Gladys. "Flossie, could you lend me sixpence? To-morrow night's treasury you know, and I'm just 'stony' till then."

"I'm afraid I'm in the same condition, Glas dear; I'm very sorry."

"What is it you want?" asks Elsie McKenzie, "I can lend you some money if you like."

"Oh, you dear creature!" says Gladys, and rushes off to the boy who is getting bewildered with the various orders, for Mr. Cobb keeps shouting down the stairs, "Where's that boy? Here, boy! go and fetch two bottles of stout and look sharp," and more than one

man wants whisky. There is no bar to any of these halls. Everything has to be fetched in from outside, and the boy has to make several journeys before we all get what we want.

"Hairpins! Of your charity I pray you somebody lend me a few hairpins!" calls out Margaret. "I've bought two packets this week and haven't got one left. Wherever they all get to I can't think!" It so happens that nearly all of us are short of hairpins on this particular night, and Margaret's cries go unheeded till Miss Collier enters the room and kindly bids her take whatever she wants from her dressing-place.

"Is there any perfect laidy in this room?" says Flossie Hare (who is *not* a "perfect laidy"), turning round from the mantelpiece. This is the way in which she usually begins asking for the loan of something. Nobody takes any notice.

"Is there any perfect laidy in this room?" repeats Flossie in a slightly raised voice.

"No, Miss Hare, there isn't," says Miss Lefevre quietly.

Flossie subsides. She is a little bit afraid of our "heavy lead," who doesn't like her.

Presently she says, "Glassie dear!"

"What do you want?" asks Gladys, without turning her head.

"Only just a big safety-pin for my Christian robes; you shall have it back presently."

"I haven't got one left—ask Rosie."

Flossie calls across to me and I extract a safety-pin from the depths of my box and hand it across with great reluctance, because all my safety-pins mysteriously disappeared the last time Flossie Hare dressed next to me.

Presently the pastry arrives. It looks unwholesome, and is palpably too much for the money.

"I tell you what it is, Grace Barker," says Sylvester, who is sharing a bottle of lemonade with me—we drink it by turns out of the bottle, which is a bit difficult, because the glass marble *will* keep falling into the neck—"if you eat those two big puffs you'll never be able to do the shrieks properly when you're tortured."

"Oh, I'm all right," says Grace confidently, "I've got plenty of breath, don't you worry about me, Belle."

She is only halfway through the second puff when she is called for her principal scene. I am in the passage trying to get a breath of air, and, listening in the distance to Grace's screams, seem to fancy they are muffled and not so heart-rending as usual.

After the Forest Scene, in which most of us as Christians are duly slaughtered, we all troop back into the dressing-room to turn ourselves into ladies of the Roman *demi-monde*.

Just after the last girl enters there is a tap at the door, and Mr. Powell's affected voice is heard asking in niminy-piminy tones, "Can any lady be so very kind as to lend me a piece of soap? We left ours behind us last night. Oh, thanks, *so* much," as in response the door is opened a couple of inches, and a hand with a cake of wet soap in it is thrust through the crack. "So *sweet* of you! I'll be sure to return it presently."

It's Margaret's soap, and she knows perfectly well that she will never see it again, but one cannot refuse to lend soap and candles and odds and ends—we all do it in turn, and money too when we have it, which is seldom enough for most of us, heaven knows!

We have plenty of time for our next change so take things easily.

I take off my Christian robe and hang it on one of the nails which I have banged into the wall with the heel of my boot, slip on my silk gown, and proceed to arrange my drapery as best I can by the light of two tottering candles and a small looking-glass propped up on the window-ledge.

"I do love that red silk drapery of yours, Rosie," says Flossie Hare, who is decidedly artistic; "wherever did you get it? You didn't have it when we started. Does it belong to the wardrobe?"

"No, my mother sent it down to me from town. I wrote and told her I'd got the shabbiest little dress in the whole show, and she said she wasn't going to have her chick dressed worse than other people."

"Ah! you're lucky to have a mother," says poor Miss McKenzie sadly. She has lost hers less than six months ago.

There is a sympathetic silence for half a minute. Every one likes Elsie McKenzie. She is the most unobtrusive and best-hearted girl in the whole company. Then some one calls out, "What a smell of burning hair! Pansy, it's yours!" And Pansy, who has been dreamily holding her curling-tongs in the gas till they are nearly red-hot, and then applying them to her fringe, gazes in dismay at the dark lock which no longer adorns her handsome head but is wound round the curling-tongs, and drops on the floor when she opens them.

Pansy is philosophical. "It can't be helped," she says, "that is the second time within a week! I shall soon be bald."

"But you really should be more careful, darling," says Miss Collier, softly purring. "It's so dangerous, you know! Why, you might set your whole head alight?"

"My dear Phyllis, life isn't worth living if one worries over these little things," responds Pansy, "and there are always wigs to be had for money."

I, who am sitting on the floor on a large sheet of brown paper—one of the "tidy ways" that irritate Sylvester—proceed to put on my chains and bracelets, golden fillet and artificial flowers, and am soon ready with the others to go and join the dissipated revellers.

There is quite a rivalry among us as to who shall wear the best stage "props," and often one of the girls has a scrimpy dinner in order to purchase a gorgeous necklace or glittering paste brooch which has caught her eye in some little shop as we enter the town. It is astonishing what wonderful things of the kind can be picked up in these out-of-the-way places.

When the Bacchanalian Scene is over, the chief interest of the evening is gone for the small-part people. We are getting tired and shall be glad when the show is finished.

"Oh, how thankful I shall be to get to Greenock," says Gladys, plaintively. "Just imagine being a whole week in a place after a fortnight of one-night stands! Why, it will be heaven!"

"Well, there are only four more nights," says Elsie McKenzie kindly, "I'm sure we shall all enjoy the rest."

Conversation languishes. When we are lucky enough to get two dressing-rooms or one very large one, as sometimes happens, some of the girls are fond of practising dancing. Flossie Hare has a weakness for showing off her ability to do "the splits" and "walk up the wall," attainments which horrify refined Miss Collier and one or two of the others. It is

always great fun to edge on "The Twins" (who are big girls and don't know anything of stage-dancing) to do a "fake" cachuca when they are dressed in the Christian robes. They get into wild spirits, which are most infectious, and there are always big rounds of applause from the audience.

To-night, however, we have not room to move, and the atmosphere is stifling. Many of us are quite silent and depressed by the time the final scene is called. But no sooner is the anthem over and all the Christians off to the lions—*alias* the dressing-rooms—than there is a general scramble among the girls to dress and pack their bundles as quickly as possible.

All the men have to stay at the wings and do the growls with which the lions are supposed to greet their victims, one of whom is jolly, little Grace Barker, who plays the boy-martyr.

"Lend me some grease, Ethel, mine's all gone," says somebody, directly we enter.

"Sorry I can't. Chick and I have only just got enough to get our make-up off. Oh, yes! Here's a scrap of cocoa-butter you can have."

"Joyce, my angel, pass the comb—thanks!"

"Belle, isn't this long tail of hair yours? I found it just now in the coal-scuttle!"

"Coal-scuttle! How did it get there?"

"Must have dropped-off after the Bacchanalian Scene, I suppose. You don't pin it on tight enough."

"Where are my stockings? I've lost my stockings! Oh, here's one! No, Elsie, that's yours. Margaret, just turn over that heap of clothes on the floor and see if my stockings are there. I can't get across with all these chairs and baskets in the way."

Finally the stockings are produced from behind

somebody else's boots at the other end of the room.

"Why don't you mark your stockings?" said May Joyce, "I always mark everything."

"Oh, goodness, Joyce! we can't all be such frumps as *you*; you're a regular old maid," replies Gladys crossly.

"Could you reach my dress?" asks Margaret of one of "The Twins," who are so cramped for room this evening that they complain they have to dress "standing on their boots," and a skirt is hoisted down from a peg and passed from hand to hand till it reaches its owner.

"There! I've spilt the whole of my powder over my Christian robes," exclaims Alice Delorme. "That comes of being obliged to have one's make-up on the floor in this Black Hole of Calcutta! I wish old D. D. could have a taste of 'Fits-up' himself!"

"Belle, do try and move a little further," I say to Sylvester. "I can't spread out my wrapper or fold up my dresses properly."

"You're no worse off than other people," snaps Belle. "I'm jammed right up in this corner; bundle your things up anyhow, as I do."

"I never have and I never will," I say determinedly. "If you choose to look like a walking old-clothes shop on the stage, you can, but I don't intend to for anybody."

"All right, Miss Prim, but do hurry up for goodness sake! You won't be dressed for an hour at this rate. If you're not ready in five minutes sharp, I shan't wait for you."

Finally we all get dressed by degrees, and when Mrs. Dighton comes in for the bundles, they are nearly

all ready for her. Then we drift off gradually to our various quarters all over the town, rejoicing that the train-call to-morrow is not till eleven o'clock, and that after next Sunday we have got our week's stay at Greenock—the one whole week of the tour, and for which we are all making many plans.

CHAPTER VI

ENTERTAINING

“**A**DMIRING the beauties of Nature, Miss Roupell?”
says a voice over my shoulder.

I turn round suddenly and face Mr. Parry.

“Oh, isn’t it sublime?” I say in awe-struck tones.

“H’m! Ye—es—it’s rather nice,” he responds critically.

“*Nice* indeed! You blind person! Apple-tarts are nice and girls are nice—sometimes—but to call this scene nice! I must say your adjectives are extremely limited.”

“Well,” said Parry calmly, “you see I was brought up in the Isle of Wight, and don’t think much of scenery.”

I try to wither him with a look of contempt, but it doesn’t seem effectual. Finding me, however, disinclined to conversation, he leaves me after a minute or two and strolls along the sea-front, while I am left to my silent enjoyment of the prospect at fair Rothesay.

The pier juts out at a big right angle; the gorse and heather-covered mountains, all ablaze in lovely, vivid colouring of red and purple, gold and green, rise all around the bay near and far, while in the watery sun

the white sails of the yachts, and countless numbers of graceful, snowy-winged gulls, gleam afar on the clear, grey sea, and add to the beauty of the scene. At the back the picturesque town straggles up and down the hills, and the whole scene is so exquisite that one can only keep on thinking, "Beautiful ! beautiful !"

But the afternoon wanes, and it is nearly tea-time. Reluctantly I tear myself away from the road above the shore, and bend my steps towards our lodgings. As I open the parlour door Belle, who is sitting gazing into the fire, bursts out impetuously, "Rosie, I've been thinking !"

"Dear me ! What a remarkable achievement !"

"Don't be sarcastic, midget. I'm a great deal cleverer than you are."

"Oh, I daresay. Nothing very wonderful in that. What have you been thinking about ?"

"We must give a tea when we get to Greenock !"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Two teas, in fact."

"Why two ?"

"Because we shall never be able to pack all the people we want to ask into one small sitting-room."

"We may happen to get a large one."

"Not very likely ! Besides, it won't do to mix everybody."

"No, there you're right. Well, I suppose it must be two teas then, but don't forget that every one else will be giving teas as well."

"Oh !" says Belle, confidently, "they'll all be sure to come to ours, and I'm going to have things in style, I can tell you."

I look up from my tea-cup rather alarmed. "What do you mean ?"

"Well, I'm not going to give only tea and cake and bread and butter, but a regular high tea with flowers and heaps of things."

"It's quite unnecessary ; nobody else will do it."

"That's exactly why I want to," says Belle. "Some of the girls detest me, they're so jealous, and I mean to show them that I know a thing or two if I *do* only walk on, and this *is* my first tour. I'll stand the whole expense if you don't care to spend the money."

"No," I say, roused ; "it's true I can't afford it, but as long as we live together I mean to share everything. Otherwise I shouldn't feel free to ask people. But I warn you, I shall protest against unnecessary expense."

"Well, in the first place I mean to have coffee as well as tea. Some of the men don't like tea."

"Yes, that's a good idea."

"Then I'm going to make a lobster mayonnaise."

"Belle, it's quite absurd !"

"It's not absurd, and I can make most lovely mayonnaise. It'll be as popular as anything."

"Well," I say dubiously, "you'll have to make it with tinned lobsters."

"I won't do anything of the kind, you stingy thing!"

"You will," I say determinedly. "We shall be able to get the best at Greenock, with the tins all lined with paper. It's not at all cheap, but it's about half the price of fresh lobsters."

"Well," says Belle, dropping the lobster subject, "then we must have sandwiches."

"Oh, indeed, and who's to cut the sandwiches ?"

"Why, you, of course, and the bread and butter too."

"Oh, yes, and make the tea and coffee, and set the table, and open the door, and do the chores generally, I suppose."

"Don't be so ill-natured and horrid. You can have the landlady to help you."

"H'm!" I say, with a backward glance at our landlady experience of the past few weeks; "I think, on the whole, I'll undertake most of it myself. But what are *you* going to do?"

"Why, mix the mayonnaise, of course; it takes nearly all day to make a good one."

"Oh, well," I say resignedly, "what else?"

"Let me see," reflecting deeply; "why, we might have fruit, and French pastry, and sweets, and—and—oh, lots of things."

"Good heavens! Sylvester, we shall have to live on bread and butter for a fortnight to make up for it."

"Well, that won't hurt you. Don't be a pig, Rosie."

"I'm not a pig!" I say with indignation. "But I get so fearfully hungry in this keen air that I need something more substantial than bread and butter for dinner."

"Well, you shall have a herring with it if you're good, or potato soup. Now, don't make any more objections, but just help me to make a list whom to ask, and be quick and finish your tea; we shall have to be at the hall soon."

We spend the next few days at manufacturing towns right inland, and have rather a wearisome journey to Greenock, but have booked our lodgings beforehand, and are lucky enough to get pretty good ones, with a fine, large sitting-room and a piano. Our landlady, however, who happens to be English, is not too obliging.

On the morning of our first "At Home" she, on hearing of the tea-party, has, rather suspiciously, to stay in bed with a most violent sick headache, and her daughter says all she can do for us in the after-

noon is to make the tea and coffee. They evidently object to visitors, and I can see that my prophecy will be fulfilled, and that I shall have to do "the chores generally."

Before going out very early to do our catering we hunt up all the available glass and crockery.

"Edith, won't you be able to let us have some more plates, please?" I say, opening the kitchen door.

"I'm afraid not, miss, we've broke such a lot lately, and you've got the best tea-set, and all the hextry things." (This girl is unmistakably a Londoner.)

I go back to the sitting-room rather distressed. "Sylvester, whatever shall we do with so few plates? You can't give people bananas and grapes and things in their fingers."

Belle considers for a minute and then brightens up. "I know," she says, "we'll try and get some little ornamental cardboard dishes at the fruiterer's, and write a name and complimentary verse in each, so that every one has his or her own special plate. I've seen it done in the 'States' and it's always a success. What shall we do for flower vases?"

I gaze round the room at the appalling ornaments and shake my head. "These won't do—they're quite too awful! Let us buy a lot of fresh chrysanthemums, different colours, and strew them all about the table and dishes—that will look careless and pretty."

"All right! And now come along quick! We've got heaps to do this morning."

An hour afterwards we re-enter our room, laden with flowers and small purchases, and finding most of the other things already sent home, begin our preparations for the afternoon. We find Philip Maunder and Bertie Verschoyle, who have got the other set of rooms across

the landing, already comfortably installed in our quarters, the former to hinder and criticise, while the latter, who at present is devoted to Belle, announces that he has come to help mix the mayonnaise. We get a lot of fun out of all the preparations, though the boys keep teasing us dreadfully about our grand "At Home," and finally disappoint us both by saying they can't come, declining to give a reason. But Belle is not easily put off by excuses, and presently worms out the truth.

"Well, look here, Miss Sylvester," says Bertie in a dignified manner, "this is your first tour, and you and Miss Roupell don't understand anything about professional etiquette. I've been two years in the profession, and I must say that I think it isn't at all the thing to invite the managers to meet the small-part people. Phil and I would feel jolly uncomfortable to be here with Mr. Rossiter and Andrews and Cobb, but we'll be very pleased to come to your other tea, if you'll ask us."

Belle and I look at each other in dismay. "But, Bertie, *we* are small-part people too, and they are coming to us."

"Oh, Miss Roupell, you don't understand," says Bertie impatiently; "you're girls and it's different, but Rossiter and Andrews wouldn't come to *us* if we asked them, and we shouldn't have the cheek. And now we've got to go back and write our letters before dinner, so goodbye and good luck!"

The boys depart, and Belle and I feel a little limp and disheartened. Presently there's a knock at the door, and a shock-headed girl puts in her head. "Please, ladies, I sent little Johnnie for the cream and he's bin and fell down with the pitcher and broke

it and spilt it all, and 'e says they 'adn't got no more."

"Oh, Edith, how tiresome! Do try and get us another lot. Isn't there another dairy somewhere?"

"Well, miss, I'll try if you'll give me the money, but I'm afraid it's no use."

I draw forth my purse with a sigh—it's getting so dreadfully light.

All we have to do now before dressing is to write the verses for the little cardboard dishes and finally to lay the table.

We have twelve guests coming, and Belle and I divide the verses between us, agreeing to compare notes afterwards. It's fearfully difficult to write appropriate verses for some of the people, and we've got so little time to do it in, but we both scribble away and get finished sooner than we expected. Then we read them out. Some verses are utter rubbish, some are fair, and one or two really good. Belle and I fall out about one of hers. I say it doesn't scan. She says it does. I tell her she hasn't got a rhythmical ear, to which she retorts that I'm so horribly conceited, I think nobody can do anything except myself. Finally we agree to submit the matter to arbitration, and scampering across the landing, break in upon the boys at their dinner with scant ceremony.

They hear the verse read and decide in my favour. Belle retires discomfited, I in triumph, and am allowed to amend the offending lines, though my companion keeps muttering, "I don't care what you say, I know it's all right."

By the time we have neatly printed the verses into the plates, arranged the room, and set the table, we've got barely an hour left to dress and do our hair. Belle

looks very striking and handsome in a Paris gown which has been reposing at the bottom of her trunk undisturbed for many weeks past, and I give a jealous little sigh for my own insignificant appearance, as I don my best silk blouse, and do my utmost to look *chic* and pretty.

Presently we re-enter the sitting-room and fidget about, putting a touch here and there, altering the position of a chair or sofa, and placing the flowers differently.

"It's past four o'clock, Sylvester—time some of them were here."

As I finish speaking there's a knock at the outer door (we are living on a flat) and after an unaccountable delay, Miss Hexham, our pianiste, enters, followed by Pansy, who—very short-sighted—drifts into the room in a sort of aimless way, as if she were not quite sure where she was going. She is dressed in a tumbled, clinging gown that shows off her lanky figure to the greatest possible disadvantage, and her hair—looking as if she had been pulled through a bush—is crowned by a most extraordinary hat. But her face is attractive and beautiful as ever.

"The girl left us at the street door," she explains, "and somehow we got across the landing and walked right in upon Mr. Maunder and Bertie Verschoyle. How *charming* everything looks and what a *comfortable* chair! How *lucky* you are to get such rooms! Ours are quite too *deplorable*!"

Another knock! Mr. Blane, despair written on his face, but got up "regardless of expense," bows with picturesque grace to Sylvester and myself, and falls into an attitude, with his elbow on the mantel-piece and head on hand. Now enter Miss Lefevre,

looking elegant as usual, and handsome, good-tempered Margaret. Another knock at the outer door. I am talking to Miss Lefevre and do not notice it. "Rosie, there's a knock! Don't you hear it?" calls Belle imperiously across the room. "Run, quick, and open the door!"

Oh! how that girl does put up my back sometimes! Treating me like a little parlourmaid before our visitors! I cross the room with smiling face, but make a mental note to give it her well by and by.

Here are Messrs. Cobb and Andrews, but no actor-manager. What a disappointment! "Mr. Rossiter sends a thousand apologies," says little Mr. Andrews in his cheery voice, "but he is desperately busy writing most important letters, and must get them off before the show begins. I really ought not to be here either, for I've got a dozen things to attend to, but I thought I must snatch an hour to come to *your* tea." This to Belle, who is one of his favourites.

They are nearly all here now. I begin pouring out tea, while Belle dispenses coffee. Tommy Hunt, bright and irrepressible, is the most useful person in the room, and the greatest help. Little cares *he* for professional etiquette, real or imaginary, and is quite as much at home with the managers and leading ladies as with any of the boys or girls.

The lively "Twins" help to make everything go with a swing. They soon seize upon our cardboard plates. "Oh! What are these, Roupell? What a ripping idea! Why, there's one for everybody in the room! What's your verse, Chick? Here's mine—

"With a face like smiling May,
Here is happy Ethel Gray!

One of Nero's jolly twins ;
When they enter fun begins !
Take with goodies hearty wishes,
From our little cardboard dishes.' "

" Margaret, yours is just sweet ! "

" Maiden with complexion fair
And the wealth of golden hair,
May Dame Fortune shed her fame,
Dearest Madge, upon your name."

" Read yours out, Mr. Blane. Why, how bashful you
are ! What is it ? "

" Gloomy, dashing Mr. Blane !
With your clever actor-brain,
And artist-yearning !
We will try with might and main
Smiles to bring to you again ;
It's a very lengthy lane
That has no turning."

" That's not bad, but I don't quite understand what
it's all about. I'm sure some one ought to take Mr.
Rossiter his—

" ' Dear Mr. Rossiter is our kind chief ;
In him we all have the greatest belief !
Quite incomplete will each ' Company B.'
If this fine ' pro.' is not there, you'll agree.' "

" Oh, here's another ! Dear me, Miss Jackson, yours
is very complimentary ! "

' Pansy of the velvet eyes,
Ever dreaming,
Real our friendship is for you,
Never seeming !

And we're glad you will be able,
'Mid distinguished companee,
Like Narcissus of old fable,
Soon your handsome face to see
In a cup from off our table,
Not of water but of tea."

"Who wrote them, Sylvester? Which are yours and which Roupell's? I can't think how you can do it! They're awfully clever! Did you copy them out of a book?" And so on in Miss Gray's own excited, chatterbox way.

Our tea-fight is now in full swing and certainly bids fair to be a great success. People are all chattering and laughing, and express themselves "perfectly charmed" with the arrangement of the flowers, the hostesses, and everything generally.

Now come the songs and recitations from one and another. Miss Delorme opens with Tosti's "Good-bye," sung in a mellow, beautiful contralto, with any amount of feeling. Miss Gray follows with a funny little recitation, and then I am made to sing, which I do in a very tired voice.

Tommy Hunt is asked to give a song and dance, the latter rather difficult to accomplish in such a limited space, but Tom is ever ready to oblige, and getting Miss Hexham to vamp an accompaniment, he sings in a sweet falsetto, Fifi Fricot's pretty song from the *Belle of New York*, sending us all into fits of laughter when he proceeds to "capture all ze men" with his beaming, funny face, as he picks up the tails of his coat and flourishes them round, while daintily taking three little steps one way and then three the other; there is no room for more.

Happening to glance across the room while Mr.

Groves, who has a fine baritone, is piling on the agony in a most impressive love song, I see Mr. Cobb, who is sitting in a dark corner, give a hasty, surreptitious glance around to see if any one is looking. Then he plunges a thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket and draws forth with care, a tiny phial of homeopathic pilules, and shaking some into his hand, stealthily pops them up to his mouth. "Uncle Dick" is a perfect martyr to indigestion, and is always dosing himself with patent medicines and other things. He has been partaking rather freely of the lobster mayonnaise, and evidently thinks it well to be prepared for consequences.

And now Belle, who has been reserving herself for a final *coup*, in answer to universal request (in some cases curiosity), gets up to recite.

Ah! This is her hour of triumph over several of the company. I have heard many recitations, but seldom any so striking as those of Belle Sylvester. Erratic she may be, but unmistakably a bit of a genius.

She has one end of the room cleared for her, and we all crowd up to the other. Then she sits for a minute in perfect silence, while every one is on the tip-toe of expectation.

Suddenly she springs up and pushing the chair away, begins in a curious, monotonous voice, a dramatic poem of the "Wild West." After a few lines her expression changes, her cheeks grow red, and her small, dark, deep-set eyes glitter like lights at the end of a tunnel, while there is a sort of wild freedom and lawlessness about her whole person, which added to great animal magnetism, carries her audience right along with her. As for me, I am simply spell-bound, as I usually am when Belle recites. Her fine, powerful voice deepens

with passion, and as I watch her, the room and its occupants fade from my sight and I am away—away—away—out on the rolling prairie ; the land of the setting sun.

The weird loneliness of those wide, arid plains is all about me. 'Twixt sleep and waking I feel the hot, stifling atmosphere folding me so close in its embrace that I can hardly breathe. Then—sudden—I wake to the restlessness of the cattle and the significant, awful stillness of the oppressive air that heralds the approaching storm. I see the swart-faced Texan spring swift to the saddle, and urge his spirited mustang madly on in frantic vain endeavour to escape the dire peril which threatens from the multitude of frightened steers thundering behind. I see the lithe Mexican girl, with dusky hair all streaming loose, and gay reboso flung around her slender form, clinging in pale, wide-eyed terror to the man she loves. I can hear the snort of the wild cattle as they rush in furious stampede through the rustling prairie grass, lying all brown and withered in the scorching sun. I hear the dull roar coming ever nearer and nearer—I see the flying mustang stumble—fall—the frenzied girl fling herself across the man's body that she may shield him from the cruel, trampling hoofs, and sacrifice her life to save her lover—and in a shivering, blood-stained mist, the tragic ending overwhelms me—"Dolores was dead !"

Perfect silence for a second—then a great burst of applause, and in a twinkling I am back to the everyday prose of tea-cups, professional lodgings, people with whom I am well acquainted, and the approaching evening "show."

"Really, Miss Sylvester, you are *marvellous* ! I had heard so much of your reciting, but the reality is quite

beyond anything I expected. So sorry I must go, but it is getting quite late, and I take so long to make-up. So many thanks for a delightful afternoon. Goodbye ! We shall meet in Rome ! ”

A few minutes and the room is empty save for Belle and myself. I look at her and give a weary sigh. “ Well, Sylvester, it’s been a huge success, but I wish we were not going to give another tea on Friday. Somehow I’ve got a presentiment it’ll be a dead failure.”

“ Oh, rubbish, Rosie ! Don’t croak ! Hurry up and change ! I’m not going down to that dirty old theatre in this frock, and you’d ruin that delicate blouse if you got a speck of grease-paint on it.”

Alas ! That life should chiefly be made up of commonplaces !

CHAPTER VII

"SUBBING"—AUDIENCES—THE REPORT

ENTERING the hall from the front of the house one evening, the sound of a piano comes floating to me down the passage. I push open the swing door and stop for half a minute to watch the scene at the far end. There is a wide space between the front row of the stalls and the proscenium, and on the smooth parquet flooring three or four couples are moving slowly round and round to the dreamy rhythmic waltz which Mr. Parry is playing with musicianly fingers on the grand piano in one corner. It is a good many weeks now since we had the luxury of a decent orchestra. Presently Tommy Hunt catches sight of me in the distance, and calls out "Come on, Rosie!" and in another second I am circling round in Tommy's arms, with a blissful carelessness of the coming evening's work, till out of breath and practice, I turn a little giddy, and after bumping violently into another couple, we sit down in two of the reserved seats to recuperate.

Then through an open doorway, I catch sight of our little business-manager in a tiny room to the right, deeply engaged with Norris in sorting tickets and arranging programmes for the evening show, and I am

suddenly brought back to the realities of life, and to the fact that Sylvester and I only possess a shilling between us in the whole world. I walk across the hall and say in a reluctant voice, "Please, Mr. Andrews, may I speak to you for a minute?"

"Just wait two minutes, Miss Roupell. I must get this business finished first."

The two minutes spin out to five, and then Norris takes himself off, and Mr. Andrews is ready to give me his attention.

"Mr. Andrews, I'm awfully sorry to have to ask you, but could you possibly let me have my money to-night instead of to-morrow?" (We are paid twice a week.) "Sylvester hasn't had her allowance sent her for six weeks, and I was expecting a postal order to-day which didn't come, and we really haven't enough to pay our bill in the morning."

"H'm!" says little Andrews, "I don't know. So many of you ladies have been 'subbing' lately, and I'm short of money myself—the takings have been very bad this last week or two. I'm afraid," he goes on, "you spend too much."

"Well!" I say, roused, "you must know that it's fearfully expensive moving on for ever like this, and it certainly isn't possible to be very extravagant on a guinea a week! Why, none of us beginners could get on at all if our people didn't help us. Now, dear Mr. Andrews," I go on in a wheedling tone, "*do* let me have some money, please. I've tried to borrow of two or three people, but nobody seems to have a halfpenny!"

Andrews looks at me and laughs.

"Well, I suppose I must," he says. "Mind, I don't expect you to 'sub' again for the next fortnight. I'm coming round to the back after the Bacchanalian Scene,

and shall have some money with me—just look out for me and ask me then."

Relieved of all present anxiety, I swing off gaily back into the hall, where the dancing is still going on. Andrews follows me and calls out, "Now, young people, you must clear at once, please! We've got to open the early door, and you'll all be dressing in a scramble!"

Next evening, just before the rise of the curtain, Mr. Cobb steps forward on the stage and says in a very impressive voice, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Rossiter wants every one to do their very best to-night. It's *very important*."

Of course, this can only mean one thing; somebody is in front whom the management is anxious to please. Who can it be?

We have had swell houses two or three times lately. One night last week the two front rows were taken by a regular country-house party. There was a marquis, a baronet, two M.P.'s, several ladies of high degree, and a well-known novelist. A decent show of any kind is often a godsend in these little out-of-the-way places where there are country seats near by, and we sometimes get a good house in a little place where an outsider might think there would not be a couple of dozen people present.

What funny contrasts we often meet with! The next night we played in a small town in a mining district, where the audience was of the roughest description, and our landladies frightened us with tales of terrible rows that sometimes occurred during the entertainments, warning us that we might even expect a shower of rotten eggs! Happily we did not experience anything of the kind, the people behaved quite well.

We have just now come from a town where a huge travelling circus and variety show has been drawing crowds. Yesterday it only gave an afternoon performance, and consequently when the curtain rang up at night, we discovered all "the freaks" sitting in front. Most independent freaks they were too! Mr. Andrews sent the members of our rival show complimentary passes, but they all insisted on paying for the best seats, and showed the greatest appreciation of *The Days of Nero*.

The audience we all dread is the stolid, apathetic one, that nothing moves to tears or laughter, and when we hear somebody saying, "Mr. Rossiter is dreadfully upset, he never got 'a hand' in the rescue scene, they're as dull as ditch-water," we know what we've got to expect for the rest of the evening.

Next night, possibly, Grace Barker will come bounding in after her torture scene exclaiming, "Oh, girls! it's the most lovely house! All the women were howling at the back, and I got such splendid rounds," and we all cheer up, however tired we may be.

To-night, however, there is a stir of excitement in the air which spreads right through the company, for it soon leaks out that a far more important being than duke or marquis or Cabinet Minister is witnessing the show. "Somebody down from the office!"

All sorts of tales fly about. One or two declare that Drake himself has come; Bertie Verschoyle says he has recognised the well-known countenance, while others maintain that it is D. D.'s confidential manager.

"Play up! Play up!" says Cobb anxiously; "and mind you girls are all as quiet as mice in the dressing-rooms, you're so close to the stage that every word can be heard."

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Mr. Rossiter is nervous as I have never seen him yet. He has not got a trace of it on the stage, but shows it in his restlessness and irritation at the wings, and this unusual manner in our kindly actor-manager subdues us more than anything else, while it intensifies our curiosity. Nobody seems at all to know who the important person really is, and Mr. Cobb won't say.

Next morning, however, on board the boat, there is a little man of most benevolent appearance, who looks as if he wouldn't hurt a fly, to whom the management is paying great attention. He is a stranger to nearly all the company, though one or two go up and claim acquaintance, and a few others are introduced by Mr. Rossiter. The rest of us watch and whisper as we walk about the saloon deck of the *Lord of the Isles*, or lean over the side and gaze at the picturesque shoreline which is scarcely ever out of sight, or the seething foam in the wake of the steamer, while we shiver in the keen October air.

"Isn't he good-looking?" says Flossie Hare, who is very susceptible. "Quite an aristocrat!"

Phil Maunder, who is at her side, laughs scornfully. "Is that your idea of good looks? A scrubby little man like that!"

Phil is tall and stalwart, and, moreover, has a weakness for Flossie.

"The Twins" catch the last remark, and both turn round indignantly. "Indeed, Mr. Maunder," says Ethel Gray tartly, "I am quite of Miss Hare's opinion. I think he's the dearest little man imaginable, don't you, Chick?"

"Of course," replies her bosom friend. "He's perfectly *sweet*, and I'm sure he's going to say all sorts of

nice things about us to Drake ; he couldn't do anything else with that dear, benevolent mouth."

Our voyage to-day is not a long one, for we land at Dunoon, and as it is Sylvester's turn to find rooms (we usually take it week and week about), I linger till the last, and watch all "the stuff" being unloaded from the boat. Hard work this, for our men, for it has to be done very quickly while the steamer waits, and several porters are requisitioned to assist.

Our stranger critic does not come any farther with the company. He is evidently going on to Greenock, and Mr. Rossiter holds him in conversation till the man at the gangway says, "Now, sir, be you a-goin' on?" and, with a hasty farewell, our chief steps on to the landing-stage.

It is nearly three weeks later, and somebody says one day, "What on earth is the matter with Mr. Rossiter?"

"Oh, I daresay he's wild about the report."

"The report?"

"Yes; haven't you heard? Drake has sent it down from the office for everybody to see; I expect it'll be up to-night. I wonder we haven't heard about it before, but I suppose that old fellow did the round of all our companies before he went up to town."

Sure enough after the first scene we find the report—quite a lengthy one, written in a small, legible hand on foolscap—pinned up in the passage leading to the dressing-rooms. It is signed "Frank Pritchard." The cause of Mr. Rossiter's depression is explained. His rendering of Catullus is rather severely handled, and naturally he doesn't care for all the rank and file of the company to see what Drake's critic thinks of him. There is an under-current, too, of reflection on his

management which is enough to make any man sore, more especially as some of the things referred to can scarcely be avoided in such a continually "move-on" tour as ours.

"Oh ! What a shame ! He says Mr. Rossiter has too many mannerisms, and that he lets the justice scene down !" exclaims somebody, and there's quite a chorus of, "I'm sure it isn't true !"

" ' Nero is apt to mumble, and is far too confidential in his speeches to the Empress. He does not interpret the part in a sufficiently imperious manner, and is wanting in dignity. ' "

"What a nasty one for poor Pa !"

" ' Lydia has an old-fashioned and stagey method which is extremely difficult to reconcile with her youthful appearance, ' " reads out that lady in a disgusted tone ; and as she sails away she sarcastically remarks that, "No doubt Mr. Pritchard would give an infinitely better rendering of Lydia himself."

" ' Poppea has a striking appearance and speaks her lines well, but her gestures are execrable ; she uses her arms as if they were pump-handles. ' "

" ' Draco has not the most elementary notion of using his voice, which is naturally a fine one. He barks all his words out, and should be told to study elocution. ' "

" ' The part of Juba, which is distinctly intended for comic relief, is played in a heavy manner that detracts from every scene in which he appears. This is the greater pity, as the gentleman to whom this part is allotted looks it most admirably. ' "

" ' Irene walks well, and has a remarkably handsome appearance. ' "

"I say, Madge, that's good for *you* !"

"I'd a great deal rather he said I could act," grumbles Margaret.

"Well, dear, perhaps you *can't*," flippantly remarks Grace Barker, who knows very well that *she* can, and has a fine notice.

"'Flaminus clips all his words, and is too fond of showing his back to the audience; he also has an awkward stride,'" reads out that gentleman in a dismal voice over my shoulder.

"Oh, Ethel! It's perfectly *abominable* what he says about *you*!" says Miss Delorme to her devoted "Twin," who is just "off," and coming down the passage.

"'Octavia appeared to act well, as far as I could judge, for her voice was so weak I could not distinguish a single word that she uttered.' And you with that awful cold on your chest, darling. It's shameful!"

"Well, the poor man couldn't know I'd got a cold," says Miss Gray, laughing.

"You're always too forgiving, Ethel. Don't make excuses for him, horrid little creature!"

"Why!" says Phil Maunder, who is standing close by, "he's the dearest little man imaginable! I heard two girls say so on the boat going to Dunoon, and hasn't he said all sorts of nice things about us to Drake? Of course he couldn't do anything else with that dear, benevolent little mouth."

"The Twins" turn a joint indignant stare upon the last speaker and sweep off together majestically, the devoted "Chick" muttering beneath her breath, but with intentional audibility, the one word, "Cad!"

Belle now gets a look in at the report.

"The small-part ladies run about in the street

scenes like a lot of amateurs. They do not appear to know their correct positions, entrances or exits, and need constant rehearsals.' "

"Horrid old wretch ! How can we be always rehearsing when we're moving on nearly every day, and spend our time hunting for diggings ? I should just like him to try it for a week or two ! I suppose he'd like Mr. Rossiter to call a dress rehearsal on the railway platform ! "

" 'The wardrobe-mistress works well, and the dresses appear handsome.' "

"Why, she's always busy for the principals, and she's never touched a thing for me ever since we've been out."

"Nor for me," says Miss Joyce, "and I paid a shilling to the theatre laundress to 'dolly-dye' my dress at Ayr ! "

"Mine cost eighteenpence," says Flossie Hare emphatically, "because she said it was a difficult colour."

"Well, I've done every stitch of my own needle-work," I chime in. "Why, girls, you know I completely re-made *my* gown, and found new draperies too."

"So you did, Rosie, and now Mrs. Dighton gets all the credit of the dresses ! Oh, it's disgusting ! "

" 'The solos and chorus are remarkably good, and I feel that to the above remarks I must add that I have never met a nicer company *off the stage*,' " reads out Belle. "Why, that's worse than all the rest put together ! I call it adding insult to injury after saying that nobody can act a bit ! What a hateful, deceitful, little man he must be ! Do you remember, girls, how nice he seemed that day on board the boat ? "

The men make their comments more quietly, but are evidently disappointed, and some of them annoyed.

"Of course, it's business," says Cobb, who is more than a little bit ruffled at being described as "heavy," "but we treated him awfully well, and Rossiter stood a first-rate supper. It's my opinion the man intended this report to be confidential, and for Drake's eye only. Hullo, Norris! What! That scene over? Oh, Jiminy!" and Cobb flies down the passage in a way you wouldn't think possible for such a stout man and bumps into Mr. Rossiter at the corner, which doesn't improve the state of that gentleman's feelings, so poor Cobb, who is always slaving like a nigger, gets a sharp reprimand for neglecting his work.

"It's just the sort of thing Drake does do," says Pansy in her dreamy way. "I shouldn't wonder if he quite enjoyed the idea of taking the conceit out of everybody."

In consequence of the report we have a full rehearsal called for next day at Forfar, where we play two nights, and Mr. Rossiter is down upon every one, winding up with a special address to the men. Our actor-manager is one of those easy-going people who always push off everything disagreeable to the last possible moment, and then, when they *do* ever get put out, fly into dreadful tempers and frighten people.

"I've noticed," says he, "that when you all leave the dungeon for the arena in the last scene some of the gentlemen are inclined to shirk doing the growls and slip off to the dressing-rooms, leaving the work to be done by one or two people. Last night, for instance, I'm sure the audience must have thought you were being devoured by two or three yelping little dogs! What is that you are saying, sir?" turning sharply to John Flanders, who is muttering something to the man standing next him.

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"Well, sir," says Flanders, plucking up some spirit, "I've been accustomed to work in respectable crowds, and when I was engaged for this show I didn't know I should be expected to understudy a menagerie."

"Oh, indeed!" says the chief sarcastically. "Perhaps, Mr. Flanders, you consider that Mr. Drake might go to the expense of touring a real lion in order to satisfy your scruples! Now just look here, gentlemen!" (with emphasis), "I wish you to clearly understand that I don't intend you to shirk your work because we are only a few weeks from the end of the tour, and all I have to say is *this*: That every man in this company—I don't care what his position may be—is to stay at the wings on that last scene and *growl*, and any one who objects can give in his notice," and Rossiter turns on his heel and stalks off the stage like a Roman autocrat indeed.

We watch him disappear and Cobb after him, and everybody heaves a sigh of relief as some of us remain to talk things over.

"I can't think what's come over Mr. Rossiter," says Margaret. "He didn't dismiss us in his usual pleasant way, and isn't a bit like himself."

"Oh, he's all right!" says Groves quietly. "After this explosion he'll simmer down again, and we shall just muddle along in the same old way till the end of the tour, you'll see."

"He says he intends to rehearse us himself every other day," remarks Blane, with more than his usual tragic gloom.

"Oh, that's all talk; I don't suppose we shall be called again for a week or more."

"He pitched into me like anything," I say, feeling very dismal, "because he says I don't go on singing

when I'm dead on the Forest Scene, and I *do*; only last night, when Norris killed me and I fell over towards Belle, she caught me in her arms and my head got smothered up in her robes, so I couldn't get my mouth free, and you see I happen to be just in full view of Mr. Rossiter, and he can always tell if I'm singing or not."

"That Forest Scene is worth five shillings a week extra all round!" says Flanders, with emphasis. "There were three or four people on top of me last night, and I thought I should be killed in good earnest."

"Oh, it doesn't matter for a great creature like *you*," remarks Madge unfeelingly. "You can stand it, but it's bad for some of the little ones. Why, Gladys has got a bruise all up her arm, and Rosie is black and blue all over!"

"I nearly sprained my ankle badly in the scrimmage going off the Bacchanalian Scene last night," grumbles Miss Joyce. "I shan't be sorry to get out of this piece."

"Well, it won't last very much longer, thank Gawd!" says Flanders in his big, hoarse voice, "and I start rehearsing for panto. directly we get back to town; but I believe we're going to have it awfully cold up north. It looks like snow now."

CHAPTER VIII

BEHIND THE SCENES

"POWELL'S off to-night!"

"No! Is he? What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, 'Fit-up,' I suppose. *He* says it's influenza."

"He looked very seedy yesterday. Who's going to play Cato?"

"I expect Norris will have to go on."

"Norris!"

"Yes, it doesn't matter for a stupid little part like that. I've heard he often had to do it last tour."

"Well, I shall hurry up and see him; I wouldn't miss that show for anything."

So I am in my place at the wings long before I am wanted, and consequently getting into other people's way.

"Rosie," says Mr. Cobb, "what are you here for so soon? Now just look out! You nearly trod on that gas-pipe—we don't want an explosion. I must warn the other girls; there's scarcely room to move to-night."

The gas arrangements vary a good deal at the various halls we play in, because many of the latter have originally not been intended for theatrical performances. Sometimes, as to-night, there are not

only the small tubes leading to the limes, but a big india-rubber pipe like that attached to a garden hose, lying right across the O.P. side, and disappearing into a hole at the back. On it we are wholly dependent for our footlights and headlights, though the front of the house is lighted from a different source.

In obedience to Mr. Cobb I carefully step back a little, but crane my neck round the wing, in order to see the spy as he creeps with stealthy footsteps after the pair of Christians who are holding a conversation down stage.

"Inthenameofcesarail!" bursts out Norris, in his high-pitched, nasal voice, and his cheeky, cockney way.

I dare not laugh, for Cobb keeps one eye on me while his other is on the limelight, and Mr. Rossiter, who has just come out of his dressing-room, is close at my side. He looks awfully cross. I wonder what has happened to upset our usually good-tempered chief?

"Miss Roupell," he says stiffly in a whisper (we are very near the audience), "will you be good enough to keep in your dressing-room until you are called. It's quite difficult enough to get the play on at all on such a stage as this, without people hanging round the wings when they are not wanted," and with a hasty murmur, "I'm very sorry, Mr. Rossiter," I scuttle off out of the way.

In a few minutes we are called, and soon I am strolling about the stage with the others as one of the Roman crowd.

There is a murmur, "Catullus comes!" "All hail, most noble Catullus!" and the crowd divides, bowing low to the ground as our stately actor-manager comes on from the R.U.E. with haughty stride.

"What means this fierce disturbance?" says Catullus.

Picture! Then a sudden eclipse! Something has gone wrong with the gas and the stage is plunged in total darkness. We hear Cobb's voice in a hoarse whisper.

"Where's the gasman? Here you! What's the matter with that damned meter?"

Catullus keeps his head and "gags" for a couple of minutes, which to all on the stage seem an eternity, while the gasman plunges *sans ceremonie* into the dressing-room of the principal ladies, where the meter is shut up in a cupboard in the wall. In another minute the stage is all lit up again and we get through the scene all right. It seems that the lever or tap regulating the supply of gas to the stage is apt to work loose, and suddenly dropping, the lights instantly go out. It has to be attended to several times during the evening, the hall-keeper, who is also gasman, remarking calmly, that "it aye happens so!" We all thought the audience took the eclipse quite as a matter of course and as if it were part of the performance.

"What's the matter with the chief?" says somebody, later in the evening. "I heard him say 'perfectly disgraceful' just now."

"Oh, I daresay he's had a nasty letter from Drake—the show isn't paying, you know, it's been up this way too often, but old D. D. is sure to say we're all getting slack."

Most of us have got our longest "wait," and are gossiping as usual in the passages and dressing-rooms; there's no room at the wings to-night. A knock at the door, and Mr. Cobb's voice outside: "May I come in, ladies? I want to speak to all of you."

"Oh, wait a minute," says Pansy, hurriedly flinging a dressing-jacket across her bare shoulders. "Now you may come," and Mr. Cobb, red-faced and stout, a wreath of flowers round his bald wig and a big rose tumbling over one eye, enters the room with annoyance written on his face.

"Who is it brings grease-paint on to the stage?" he begins fussily. "There are black marks all over that new stage-cloth, and Mr. Rossiter is very angry about it, because it was very expensive; he says he'll fine the people who do it. Some of you girls must have dropped 'make-up' about!"

Everybody indignantly denies the accusation.

"A likely thing we should take grease-paints on to the stage," says Belle. "But whatever goes wrong in this show is always attributed to the girls. Why aren't you down upon the men?"

"Don't you be so fast, Miss Cheeky!" retorts Cobb. "I've looked at all the men's shoes already and now I'm going to examine *yours*; that's what I've come for."

We all feel annoyed, though we try to laugh it off.

"Oh, you're *quite* welcome to look at *my* feet," says first one and then another, and in rotation we all go to Mr. Cobb and turn up our sandals for his inspection. Every sole is as clean as a new pin.

"I can't understand it," says Cobb, rubbing his bald head in perplexity, "somebody must do it, you know."

"Now, Mr. Cobb, let's examine *your* feet," says little Gladys Vane. "You may be the culprit yourself!"

Cobb is a little taken aback at her impudence.

"Oh, certainly, ladies, anything to oblige you," he says with elaborate politeness, and he ponderously lifts a large, well-shaped foot, clothed in a handsome, scarlet sandal and turns the sole up to the gaze of cheeky little

Gladys. She gives a shriek of laughter, and we all crowd round, while Cobb's eyes goggle in dismay. There is a big lump of black grease-paint sticking right in the middle of the foot, and black marks all over the floor plainly show "Uncle Dick's" progress across the room.

"Now, Mr. Cobb, what have you got to say?" we ask triumphantly.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know how it happened," says poor old Cobb—"It's a most *extraordinary* thing—I suppose I ought to beg your pardon, ladies, but I *can't* understand it!" and he gives a suspicious glance round as if he thought some one might have stuck the grease-paint on to his sandal. I never saw a man so discomfited, and he retires with grumbling apologies, as we all laugh unmercifully. It is so seldom we can get the better of one of the managers.

A night or two after this Mr. Andrews meets us with a long face, as three or four enter the hall. We are obliged to be in very good time, because there is no stage-door, and we have to get across the stage from the front, before the early door is opened to the audience.

"I quite forgot when I booked this town," says Andrews, "that to-night is the Hallow-e'en carnival, and I'm afraid we shan't have twenty people in the house unless we have a procession outside first. Would any of you ladies object?"

"What! Through the streets?" I gasp. "How awful!"

"Certainly through the streets, Miss Roupell," says little Andrews with dignity. "I believe that your contract says 'to obey any reasonable request of the managers,' and I do not consider this is unreasonable.

Therefore, will you kindly inform all the other ladies that they must make-up as quickly as possible as we shall start about half-past seven in order to be back here before eight." -

We scramble off and burst wildly into the dressing-room (only one large one to-night), full of our important, dreadful piece of news, and we can't understand the calmness with which the older "pros" take it.

"You silly children," says Miss Lefevre, quietly. "Mr. Andrews is only coddling."

But several of us don't believe her and dress in a fever of anxiety as to whether we shall obey orders or rebel.

"Why, it's quite cold weather, and it would make us all ill!" says Gladys, who is divided in mind whether to believe it or not.

"I think it's great fun!" remarks Belle, "only I'm not going out with bare feet if I *am* a beggar-girl! I shall wear my boots!"

"Just fancy, how horrible!" says one of "The Twins"; "only in tights and thin silk gowns. It's just like a circus; *monstrous* I call it! But I suppose we shall have to do it."

"Urry up, ladies, please!" says Norris's voice outside, "the procession starts in twenty minutes punctual!"

"Oh, go away, Norris!" calls out Grace Barker, impatiently. "I believe it's all humbug!"

"It ain't no 'umbug, Miss Barker," says Norris, indignantly, "I'll take my solemn hoath it ain't, and Mr. Rossiter 'll be in fine tantrums if you ain't ready. Don't say I didn't warn yer!"

Oh, the wagging of tongues and the excitement

that goes on during the next few minutes! Then, suddenly, we hear Mr. Rossiter's clear, high-bred tones outside the door.

"I hope you are nearly ready to start, ladies! We shall ring up a quarter of an hour later than usual in order to go through all the principal streets—no wraps, please!"

Gentle Miss Collier, who, enfolded in a white dressing-gown smothered in lace, is still leisurely making up—she is always very slow—suddenly sits bolt upright in her chair.

"Marie, darling!" she says, in a soft, distressful voice, "I really believe they mean it! What *shall* we do?"

Miss Lefevre's dark eyes flash angrily beneath her deeply-marked brows.

"I can't believe it! I won't believe it! It's too outrageous for words!" she says emphatically. "No respectable manager would dare to offer such an insult to his company!"

But it is evident that she, too, begins to be a little bit shaky as to whether it is "coddling" or no. "At any rate," she goes on with gathering wrath, "I will die of starvation before I will submit to such a degrading exhibition, and I should instantly give in my notice and write a letter to Drake that he would not get over in a hurry!"

"But, dear love," pleads Miss Collier gently, "suppose it should be our *duty* to do it?"

"Duty!" says Miss Lefevre, with withering scorn. "Duty!" and there she stops, her feelings evidently being too much for her to express.

"Hon'y five minutes, ladies!" Norris calls out, with a bang at the door. "Small-part ladies first; they

goes in twos and twos, an' they ain't to take no wraps nor humberellas ! Hall the gentlemen is ready an' waitin', but I'll give yer another call in a minute or two ! "

Most of us have risen to the occasion, and are looking forward to some fun ; but Miss Lefevre rises to her feet, white and stern.

" Ladies ! " says she, " Miss Collier and I are the heads of this dressing-room, and I speak for her as well as myself. If this be true—and I must confess it begins to look like it—I refuse to allow the ladies of this company to be so grossly insulted, and I absolutely forbid one of you to stir from this room on such a disgraceful errand. If Mr. Rossiter has anything to say, he can say it to *me* ! "

We are quite startled, though I, for one, always knew there were unknown depths in that woman, and what with our instinct to obey Messrs. Rossiter and Andrews, our wild desire for a lark, and our dread of offending Miss Lefevre, who is a good friend but would make a very bad enemy, all we poor small-part people are fairly on thorns as the time wears slowly on.

Five minutes pass—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour !

It's nearly time to "ring-up," but no quarter has been called !

" I don't believe they're going to do it, after all," says Belle suddenly.

" Of course they're not, you goose ! " sleepily remarks Pansy, who hitherto has been perfectly silent. " I can't understand your being so silly as to imagine they were."

" But Mr. Andrews was so serious about it," I say ; " I'm *sure* he meant it ! "

"My dear little Rosie," replies Nero's consort, "you are always sure that people mean everything, and it is most refreshing and unusual; but if you stay in this profession you will have to get over your strange belief in other people. It doesn't do to take everything literally in this world."

As Pansy finishes her elder-sisterly remarks, which cause me some annoyance, we hear all at once, in Norris's loud voice, "Hoverture and beginners!" and we tumble up the stairs and on to the stage with slightly bewildered minds.

The curtain rises on an almost empty house, but Mr. Rossiter, Cobb, and that horrid, wicked, little Norris are laughing at the wings, though forty people in the auditorium on a Monday night following two bad weeks are not very cheerful to contemplate.

Is this Cobb's revenge for our laughing so about his greasy shoes? Goodness knows! It is supposed to be Andrews's wheeze, but these wretched men hang together so!

"I say, Flossie," says Tommy Hunt as some of us enter the stage-door one evening; "Maunder's going to play his understudy to-night, so I've got to double and play Glaucus in the Forest Scene, and I'm going to take particular care to kill *you*."

"Oh, indeed! are you?" responds that lady tartly. "Well, Mr. Hunt, I've never died on that scene yet, and I don't intend to begin now!"

"Then you'll begin to-night," says Tommy cheerfully, "for I *will* kill you, if I have to sit on your head!"

By the time "the Battalion" come rushing on in the Forest Scene, Flossie Hare has entirely forgotten Tommy's threat of two hours ago, and, being quite

unprepared for his sudden onslaught, topples over towards the footlights. He holds her down with all his strength, while she glares fiercely up at him and struggles to get free, bursting with indignation, and when the curtain goes up again on "the picture," in answer to a great burst of applause from the audience, Flossie's resuscitated corpse is in an upright position, and gives a vigorous, angry waggle of the head, which, luckily for us all, escapes the notice of the chief.

Another night some of us are waiting on a very draughty staircase to sing the anthem. There are four or five anthems during the show, but this one is supposed to fall upon the ears of the audience from a far-away dungeon, and it is sometimes difficult to gauge the right distance at every fresh place. Mr. Powell, who is leaning against the wall at my side, says to me languidly, "Miss Roupell, how much I admire that bracelet you wear, it's really most artistic! It is valuable, is it not?"

"Oh, no," I answer; "it's only a 'prop.' (I paid sixpence three-farthings for it in a small fancy shop at Berwick.) 'Would you like to look at it?'"

I take it off my arm and pass it to him. He gazes at it with artistic adoration.

"Really a work of art!" he murmurs. "The colours are divine!—quite pre-Raphaelite! Would you allow me to wear it some night upon the Bacchanalian Scene?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure—in fact you may keep it if you like."

"I cannot express my deep sense of your goodness," he says; "but I feel I should scarcely like to deprive you of such an artistic treasure!"

"Oh, nonsense!" I reply. "You're quite welcome to it. I've got plenty of other 'props,'" and he thanks me in long-winded and well-chosen sentences.

Little do I think what a bother I am going to have because of this little act of courtesy.

Next night we are standing behind the back of the Bacchanalian Scene, waiting for Cobb to give the cue for the laughs, when Tommy Hunt comes up to me with thunder on his brow.

"You've given a bracelet to Powell!" he says abruptly.

"Well, what of that?"

"You've never given *me* a bracelet!" in a tragic voice.

"Why, no; why should I? I can surely give things to whom I like?"

"Rosie, you're a horrid, little flirt! Why do you play with me like this? You know I love you to distraction! And to see you gone upon that idiot of a Powell is more than flesh and blood can stand!"

"*I gone upon Powell?*" I say in amazement. "Don't be so absurd!"

"Miss Roupell, do you intend to take me seriously, or do you not?"

I feel inclined to be angry, but my sense of the ridiculous saves me in time, and I begin to laugh instead. It is so impossible to take Tommy seriously—nobody ever does.

"Pray don't be ridiculous, Tommy—I'm nearly old enough to be your grandmother! Run away and play!"

Tommy looks at me with concentrated fury.

"Miss Roupell," he begins in such a loud voice

that he attracts the attention of Mr. Cobb. "Sh! Sh!" he says angrily. "What are you two chattering about? Hold your tongues! It's perfectly disgraceful the noise you're all making! Sh! Sh! I'll have you all fined to-morrow! Here," holding up a chased, metal goblet, "Rosie, you take this and be quiet!"

I dodge it, saying, "Mr. Cobb, I never have to drink on this scene."

"Well, Hunt, you take it; and here, Groves!" and he thrusts another goblet into Groves's unwilling hands before he can draw them away. We all detest to take the goblets and pretend to drink on the Bacchanalian Scene. It's such a nuisance, and every night we try to dodge this bit of business, but once we've got the goblets we have to keep them, for if one fell there would be a loud, metallic clatter, very detrimental to the scene in front, and woe betide the unlucky culprit!

Mr. Cobb sees us all duly arranged in the picture which greets the eye of the audience every time the door at the back is opened, and proceeds to lead the laughs at the cues given by Rossiter in front. Cobb has a fine, jolly, rolling laugh, but to-night he laughs chiefly alone. We are all dead tired, rebellious, and out of temper.

"I can't think what's the matter with you all," he says in a savage whisper; "I'll have a call for the laughs to-morrow—don't think you're going to escape! Sh! Sh! Stop talking! Now!" and with a swing the door flies open, and we dissipated revelers, arms flung around each other, and looking as completely *roué* as we know how, stagger on to one of the principal scenes of the piece.

I am obliged to stand next to Tommy Hunt, who is so hurt and angry that he absolutely turns his back upon me, and bestows all his attention on the lady at his other side. As there are not quite enough men to go round (we are supposed to have one a-piece) Miss Delorme and I have to share him between us, which makes it decidedly awkward when he gets "the hump," and positively refuses to revel. As I have no one to gambol with, Mr. Cobb, of course, thinks I am shirking my work, and glares at me across the stage so fiercely from beneath his wreath of roses that I feel compelled to do a little jig on my own account, but fear it is a feeble one, and know instinctively that I have failed.

But I haven't yet heard the last of my "prop," bestowed in a fit of blind generosity.

By and by we are waiting for the last scene, when Grace Barker speaks to me rather stiffly.

"I think I saw a bracelet of yours on Mr. Powell's arm to-night, Miss Roupell ; in fact, he showed it to me."

"Oh, indeed," I respond shortly. "Well, I hope you admired it."

"May I ask since when you and Mr. Powell have begun to be so very friendly?"

"I'm not aware that we are particularly friendly. It's the first I've heard of it."

"When a lady gets so far as to offer a gentleman a *gage d'amour*, one may be allowed to imagine that there is more in the affair than meets the eye!"

"Oh, don't be so silly, Grace!" I say impatiently, "and for goodness sake don't be theatrical off the stage! Mr. Powell admired the bracelet, and I gave

it him on the impulse of the moment. You know perfectly well we're all constantly giving each other trifles like that ; but of course we're all aware that you consider Powell your personal property, and if it's any satisfaction to you, I can assure you that he's about the last man in the company who would ever have any attraction for *me*"—which speech is repeated on the earliest possible occasion to Mr. Powell, and he gets *his* feelings hurt.

Oh, that wretched bracelet ! I wish it had been at the bottom of the sea before I had given it away !

After another evening of disagreeable looks and silence to me upon Tommy's part, I get a fearful ear-wiggling from the stage-manager, who wants to know why I stand "like a stick" on the Bacchanalian Scene. I try to explain. "Rubbish !" says Cobb ; "we can't have private quarrels brought into the theatre, you know. Now, you take my tip, Rosie, and make it up with Tom. Give him the necklace or whatever he wants, but for Heaven's sake jump about and look livelier to-night !"

I see there's no help for it, solemnly make my peace with Tommy, and present him with a bracelet very similar to the other. I would almost as soon wear penny curtain-rings—they're quite as effective from the front—and Tommy is absolutely delighted with my mark of favour, and shows his new "prop." to every one he comes across. What a set of babies they are, these youthful aspirants to a fine profession !

CHAPTER IX

LITTLE WORRIES—THE SWALLOW CLUB—A VISIT TO THRUMS

“**Y**OU'RE the most awful fidget that ever lived and I'm not going to be nagged!” said Sylvester, as she flounced off to the dressing-room. She and I were staying at the Temperance Hotel opposite. It was a pouring wet day, and as we either had to use the public sitting-room or stay upstairs in a rather cheerless attic bedroom, we preferred to spend our time at the hall, where one was sure of meeting somebody or other, and which happened to be warm and comfortable.

I sat down in one of the stalls (stalls by courtesy), and meditated upon all my woes. For the sixth or seventh time since the tour began, I was seriously making up my mind to part from Belle and weighing all the pros and cons. If I left her I should have to live by myself, for I was too independent to attempt to fasten upon any other pair or trio of the girls. In many respects it was much better to live with somebody else, and certainly easier to get rooms for two people than for one. Belle had several good points, but she worried me to death. What a curious creature she was! Certainly not American, though she had unmis-

takably lived a long time in "The States." I taxed her as being partly Irish and a sort of general mixture, with a big dash of "Coon" thrown in. She was very talented and capable of doing great things on the stage or at anything else she chose to take up, only that she lacked continuity and power of concentration. As for the play, I believe she knew it off by heart, and could have taken any one of the parts, from Catullus downwards, at quite short notice. I had lived with her a good many weeks now, but in reality knew little more about her than did the rest of the company. She aroused my curiosity very much, but what always held me back from trying to find things out about her was the simple fact that she trusted me, though she was naturally most suspicious of everybody. She kept all her valuables, money, jewellery, a bunch of keys, and any number of letters in a small leather hand-bag, which, when I first knew her, she used to hide about our rooms before starting out on an expedition (she was a great sightseer), or going to the theatre at night. After the first two or three weeks, however, she would give it to me to take care of, or lock up inside my Gladstone bag, and I am very glad that I never abused her confidence. Her private affairs had certainly nothing whatever to do with me, and in many respects she was a good enough chum, though at times very trying.

One of her vagaries was a perfect mania for pickles ! She always toured a big bottle, which I declined to carry on any occasion, because they don't appeal to my taste, and Belle invariably made me take along the other edibles, butter, tea, &c. She would eat pickles in quantities at nearly every meal, though she knew it was unwise—I was always telling her so ; once or twice before we started for the theatre she implored me to

hide the pickles in some place where she wouldn't be likely to find them. Then, when we went home, she would hunt all over the room for her beloved pickle-jar and get downright angry with me when I sternly refused to disclose its whereabouts. I've known that girl get up half an hour after we had gone to bed and eat several pickled gherkins, and then she would keep me awake, groaning and saying she had got dyspepsia, and that she knew she was on the way to an early grave!

She was a bit of a clairvoyant and medium too, but that's too long a story to enter into here.

Apart from Belle Sylvester I had other things to worry me. The news from home was not cheerful, for my mother was ill and there were other troubles. Then I was running short of money, though we managed now far more economically than we had known how to do at first, and to add to my depression, I had hurt my hand not half an hour ago, and it was aching badly.

"What have you two been quarrelling about?" said Mr. Cobb, coming down from the stage where he had been superintending the putting up of "the frame."

"Well, you see, Mr. Cobb, I'm rather nervous of strange dogs, and Sylvester is just crazy over animals of every kind. She picked up a huge collie in the street this morning all covered with mud, and looking awfully fierce, and brought him right up into our bedroom. I told her I wouldn't have it, and she said she should do exactly as she pleased. How would *you* like it?"

"H'm," said Mr. Cobb, "I don't think I should mind. I'm afraid you're a bit of a fidget, Rosie. What have you done to your hand? It's bleeding!"

"Chipped a piece out of it dragging my basket from

under all the others. Norris said he hadn't got time."

"Well, I don't suppose he had, my dear ; Norris is a busy man ; let me plaster it up !" which he did with the greatest care and some postal margin.

"Do you know anything good for indigestion ?" he asked me suddenly.

"No, I'm afraid I don't. What are you taking, Mr. Cobb ?"

"Oh, Mother Siegel's Syrup at present. I tried nux vomica last, but nothing seems to do me any good," in a dismal voice.

"Why don't you drink hot water with your dinner ?"

"Oh, mercy ! What next ? Why I couldn't get on at all without a glass of beer ! I think I'll go back to the nux. Hot water, indeed !" said Cobb with a grimace. His large, good-tempered visage was quite a study in facial expression, and he really seemed annoyed as he walked away.

Not until Mr. Cobb was out of ear-shot did I remember that I had intended to speak to him about the great discomfort we had been put to in the dressing-rooms lately. Strictly speaking, it was not my business, as I was one of the small-part ladies, and it was quite possible that "Uncle Dick" would snap my head off, but I was going to risk that because I knew that a soft spot existed in his heart for me, and the way the girls had been made to shift lately was really disgraceful.

At a town on the north-east coast we had reached the previous week, the whole of us had been penned into a little room, not more than twelve feet by ten. Several theatre baskets were inside, along with three tables and a lot of chairs. The men had a huge room,

and part of it could easily have been curtained off for some of us if Messrs. Rossiter and Cobb had been inclined to have it done. When I saw that apartment of ours in the evening—its morning emptiness had been bad enough—I was in despair! The noise, the reeking atmosphere, and a fire smoking densely to boot, were something too awful! I gave a look around, reflected a minute, and then a happy thought struck me. The door opened into a deep recess off the passage through which every one had to pass on their way to the stage. I took the large wrapper off my bundle, brought out the gimlet and screw-hooks which I invariably carried in my make-up box, and with their aid stretched the wrapper as a curtain right across the passage to the gas-bracket. Norris good-naturedly procured me a chair—I always took good care to keep on the right side of our autocratic little baggage-man—and there in my recess, outside the dressing-room door, I dressed in comparative comfort, and even to the envy of some of the others.

The night before Belle and I had dressed in a draughty stone passage by the dim light of candles which every few minutes flickered out in the gusts of wind which poured from the constantly opening doors—there was a yard open to the sky outside—and somewhere else, two or three of us were screwed up in one corner of a dirty cellar—it was nothing else—with concrete walls, stone floor, and an open grating near the roof from which came draughts fit to blow one's head off.

There is another subject that I can barely touch upon in such a book as this, and that is the sanitary arrangements. Suffice it to say that again and again none whatever existed at the halls we played in, and several

times we did not have so much as a bowl of water in which to wash our hands, but all the ladies, leads included, were obliged to get rid of the paint and dust with grease and dry towels as best they could.

More than one hall-keeper had quite an altercation with the managers when they insisted on taking the best dressing-rooms for the men, and one old fellow stoutly refused to give in on any account.

"Na, na, I winna hae it !" said he stubbornly to Mr. Cobb, "this chawmer has aye been for the leddies, an' here they stop !" And we did too, while, with two or three exceptions, the men had to climb up a long flight of rickety ladder-like stairs to the deplorable attic which our managers had designed for the ladies of the company.

Well, it was too late now to tackle "Uncle Dick" upon the subject ; I must await another chance, though I was not likely to get such another good one in a hurry, so with a sigh of regret at my stupid forgetfulness, I drew out my budget of home letters and settled down to read them for the third time that day.

I was half-way through the second when Margaret entered the hall.

"Rosie," she said, "do you know whether the washing-basket has come?"

"No, I don't think it has. Do you specially want it?"

"Why, yes, of course I do, like everybody else ; it's horribly inconvenient, the basket getting lost like this for three whole weeks. I don't possess a clean handkerchief or anything else, and it's almost impossible to get washing done at these one- or two-night stands. The management ought to make some better arrangement than sending our washing down to Yorkshire."

"I don't see how they can," said I. "After all, it isn't their business to get it done at all. But I usually send my things home, you know."

"What! Right up to London?"

"Yes, I got tired of the other arrangement long ago, the clothes came back such a bad colour, so now I just post my washing home, and my people get it done for me."

"That's not a bad idea," said Margaret, "I think I shall try it. Meanwhile, I shall have to buy some new things—it's awfully tiresome. Oh, by the bye, do you know I'm going to play my understudy next week at Elgin?"

"No! Really? I'm so glad! I do hope you'll get on, Margaret, I'm sure you deserve it."

"Thanks, Rosie dear, that's very sweet of you, but you know we are all to play our understudies before the tour ends. I asked Mr. Rossiter for Elgin because I know there is a lovely hall there and good dressing-rooms. Isn't it a splendid idea about the club?"

"What club?" said I.

"Why, don't you know? Oh, I forgot, some of you haven't been in our room the last two nights. Well, we girls are going to have a club, with a magazine and paper-chases and different things; isn't it jolly?"

"Yes, but it seems so late in the tour to start it."

"That doesn't matter—one can get a lot of fun into a few weeks. We're all going to pay twopence a week, which will go to some charity or other. The first number of the Mag. is to come out next Monday, I believe. Miss Lefevre has promised to edit it and Miss Collier will help. Ethel Gray has undertaken to do the cover—you know she paints beautifully. One of us will write interviews, and Flossie Hare is going

to write fashion notes. Grace Barker says she will do company gossip. Some of us will have to write stories, and you, of course, will write the poetry."

"But I can't write poetry!"

"What a fib, Rosie! You know you do. Think of all those verses at your tea-party at Greenock!"

"Oh, that rubbish! Why, anybody can hammer out stuff like that!"

"No everybody can't! At any rate you've got to be the poetess, and Miss Lefevre says you will have to write a dedicatory poem to 'The Swallow Club'—that's the name we've decided on—you'll hear all about it to-night. I wonder the girls were not talking about it in the train this morning."

The first number of *The Swallow* came out the following Monday. Miss Lefevre had devoted nearly all the previous day to editing it instead of taking her usual Sunday rest.

There were a good many contributions, all written on large quarto paper, the size agreed upon, and stabbed together with a big paper fastener. On the whole the Mag. was wonderfully good. Miss Grey's frontispiece was very pretty, a flight of swallows diagonally across the page, with roses and thistles in two corners emblematical of the "twa countries." I couldn't imagine how she found time to do it, but she was a most energetic girl and very skilful with her brush. I had cudgelled my brains to produce suitable verses, but the result was very indifferent. Who can write verses to order? However, the girls were satisfied, so it was all right. Each pair or trio who lived together were allowed to keep the magazine for one day, as there was only the only copy, and then had to pass it on, it being finally raffled for and kept by the winner.

The "Company Gossip" was personal—very personal—and there were a good many hints at the gentlemen. Several of the latter were indignant that they were not allowed to join the club or to glance at the magazine, though we must have had a traitor in the camp, or how could one or two of the men have taunted us about some of the contents? Tommy Hunt spitefully remarked that he supposed we called our club "The Swallow" because some of the girls "were always stuffing sweets." But we firmly stuck to our resolution to have lady members only. Margaret, who was a generous soul, and had more money than most of the girls, bought a number of tiny swallow brooches, and we all wore this badge of the club in some conspicuous place on hat or dress.

Our first "Hare and Hounds" run took place directly we came to a three-night town. We kept it very quiet and none of the men knew anything about it till it was over. It was very difficult to find sufficient paper to tear up, and we all had to lay our landladies under contributions. "The Twins" volunteered to be the hares, and they were such strong, energetic girls, that they easily won the race. I forget how far we ran, but it was a pretty good distance across country. We created quite a sensation on one farm, but the farmer and his men were very jolly and helped us over some difficult places in fine style. The prizes, paid for out of the weekly subscriptions, were two splendid large towels (we wanted something useful for the dressing-room), and in one corner of each Miss Gray had drawn a swallow in marking-ink.

The boys tried hard to find out when we were going to have our next paper-chase, because they wanted to join, but we declined their company. "You've never asked us to join in your golf or other things," we

said, "and we're going to keep you out of our runs." There were several of the latter. The last was run in pouring rain, and some of us got our skirts covered in mud right up to the knees, and then Mr. Rossiter interfered—very nicely though—and said he wished we wouldn't do it. He had known nothing about the paper-chases, and was much surprised one morning to get a remonstrative letter from Dan Drake, who said he was quite sure that after paper-chasing in a "Fit-up" tour the girls couldn't be up to their work in the evening. I don't suppose we were very well, but we were so angry that some one had "let the cat out of the bag." It was almost impossible to keep things from the knowledge of "old D. D." I believe he even knew what you had for dinner, but we could never find out who used to write and tell him things.

At Perth "The Twins" gave a "cats' tea-party" to members of the club only, and we had a splendid afternoon; tea and gossip and chocolates *ad lib!* The magazine came out steadily every week, though the day for publishing varied a good deal, for after the first number Miss Lefevre found it more difficult to beat up contributions, and the editing gave her a lot of work. Still we kept it up to the end of the tour, and altogether "The Swallow Club" was a great success.

We were all looking forward to seeing Kerriemuir, but were rather disappointed on the whole. The surroundings were beautiful indeed, but the town itself seemed to consist of "two streets and a turning." Of course we all made a pilgrimage to see "The Window in Thrums," but there wasn't much to see after all, though there was a signboard on the cottage with a notice to the effect "Buns and lemonade sold

here." We had great difficulty in getting "taken in" at Kerriemuir. Certainly I refused two places, one because a lad of eighteen would have had to come through our bedroom to get to his own, and the other because it was like a filthy, little pig-stye. I had got the name of a Mrs. Duncan given me by her sister with whom we had lodged in another town, but found it very difficult to discover her whereabouts. When I asked one old body if she could direct me to Kirk Wynd, she wouldn't give me a direct answer, but said, "Is it Mrs. Dooncan ye're wantin'? I'm dootin' she's gane to anither toon, but there's Mrs. McCall doon the openin' yon, and Mrs. McPheerson in Roger's Lane, an' mebbe ane o' thim 'll tak' ye in." I afterwards discovered by calling on these individuals that they were relations of the first old lady, and she wanted to do them a good turn, though she must have known full well where Mrs. Duncan lived. In one place the only available room was already bespoken by two of the boys, and the other was the dirty, little, tumble-down hovel mentioned above. After hunting about for over an hour I at last discovered Mrs. Duncan in Kirk Wynd—there seems to be a Kirk Wynd in every Scottish town—but her best rooms were already let to some of our people. However, she was very nice, and the place beautifully clean, so we were thankful when she agreed to pack us into a tiny bedroom and let us have our meals in the kitchen. It was very cold weather, but we couldn't have a fire in the room because the large bed came right down to the fire-place, and we should have set the bed-clothes on fire! A round table and a chest of drawers practically filled up all the space, and Sylvester and I could not move without knocking against each other, which tried our tempers, and as

it came on to rain presently, we spent the afternoon in the kitchen. The opinions of Barrie, as he was seen through local spectacles, were rather amusing.

Said our landlady, on being questioned, "Ou, aye, he's joost a wee bit diminutive lookin' body, naething grand at a'," and when I tried to draw her out by saying his books were so remarkably clever, she went on, "Aweel, we folks in Kerriemuir would na' care to read them, we wad joost think it a' a pack o' daft nonsense ! It's joost a' Jimmie's loock and he's nae sae cliver as people say !"

The baker's wife, when I went into the shop for a loaf, told me just the same sort of thing. She also said contemptuously, "He was joost a wee bit body, but had a gran' lookin' wife ; she was an actress ;" and went on, "I went to schule wi' the whole lot o' thim ; there were eight bairns, Alexander an' Sarah Ann an' Jeanie an' the rest an' Jamie, he was the yoongest, an' aye clingin' to his mither an' readin' his buiks. He was a quiet chiel, an' a wee bit body."

Barrie's small size seems a great grievance to the Kerriemuirians.

Both Belle and I fell head over ears in love with our landlord. He was an insurance agent, but had formerly been at sea for twenty years as first mate or captain of a sailing boat, and had travelled all over the world. Such a big, braw, handsome Scotchman ! perhaps that was the reason his wife thought so little of the famous author of "The Little Minister."

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CHAPTER X

"DIGGINGS"

IN many respects we got on far better for "diggings" in Scotland than in Wales and the north of England, but the difficulty of getting rooms was very great.

Belle and I soon learnt wisdom, however, in many ways. During the first few weeks of the tour, we were encumbered with a lot of small baggage, which we used to leave in the station cloak-room, and by the time we had received our checks for it, the others were out of sight and had collared all the available "digs" in the town. So we made an arrangement with Norris to pay him sixpence a week for each bag or "pilgrim" basket he took up to the hall, and as a rule limited ourselves to one a-piece. We delivered these into his charge at the railway station, and he took them up with the baskets, scenery, and theatre properties. This left us perfectly free, and I soon got nick-named "Rosie, the dig-snatcher," because of the speed with which I used to hop out of the train, deposit my heavy Gladstone bag at the feet of Norris, and be off like the wind up into the town to see after rooms.

Sylvester used to say I was a "holy terror" to the other members of the company with regard to this

matter, and certainly Mr. Cobb was a little bit sore on the subject, for I overheard him complaining of me one day to one of the men.

"Upon my soul!" said he, "I can't think how that girl manages to get hold of the addresses so soon. Wherever I went this morning there was that Rosie! Down one street, Rosie in front of me! Up another, Rosie behind me! She seemed to pervade the whole place!" Then I burst out of my hiding-place with a "Whush! Rosie again!" as I rushed off down the hall and left "Uncle Dick" swearing.

Except at the beginning of the tour, Belle and I seldom used to hunt together but took it week and week about, though on the whole I was far more lucky than Sylvester in getting "settled." She said she was convinced it was because I was so small that people who didn't usually take in "pros" used to pity me and let me rooms, while she looked so large and prosperous that no one would take compassion on her. I think there was some truth in the idea. One of us would wait in the hall till the other had "settled." Then we used to get a boy to take our small baggage to our rooms; but in the early mornings there were seldom any boys to be had—they were all off to school—and we had to drag our things along as best we could to the railway station, which was nearly always a long way off, right out of the town.

At one place Belle and I quite thought we should have to sleep in the hall, as some of the others had already been obliged to do, through lack of "digs," but the English vicar and his wife came to our rescue. They passed us in the street, and I ran after them and asked them if they could tell us of any rooms. They behaved with the greatest kindness. Through their

influence Sylvester and I, with some of the men, got settled at the Temperance Hotel, where we had previously been refused. They also offered to accommodate some of us at the Vicarage, and "The Twins" gladly accepted the invitation. Belle and I went to tea there in the afternoon. Such a delightful house it was! Such a charming hostess and a pretty tea-table, set with all the refinements of civilisation! We had seen nothing like it since leaving London, and it made us all feel a bit homesick, but was a great treat. The two girls who were staying there had a delightful time, and the vicar came to see them off at the station the next morning.

This happened in late September, and the scenery in that district was lovely beyond description. Great stretches of rolling country, trees still in full summer leaf, big cornfields, yellow with the stubble, brilliant blue skies flecked with white and grey fleecy clouds, and, in the far distance, an undulating range of steep hills, outlined in purple against the dim horizon!

It was a curious thing that near our diggings Belle and I were frequently striking churchyards. It happened several times during the course of the tour, and at three places—I believe they were Hexham, Rothesay, and Forfar—the churchyard came almost up to our windows. The reason I used to object was because Sylvester would become rather "uncanny" upon these occasions, and get into one of her clairvoyant moods, which made me feel "creepy." Whether it was "fake" or genuine I can hardly tell—a little of both I fancy—but, at any rate, I took a great dislike to our rooms overlooking a churchyard.

Sometimes we happened upon very comfortable lodgings, and were more amused than annoyed at the

familiarity of the Scotch peasantry, for it was never offensive, though, truth to tell, they all looked down with infinite contempt upon us "show folk."

At one place where we stayed from Saturday to Monday, our landlady lived in a top flat, consisting of three rooms, and our bedroom was the first at the top of the stair. There was no fastening on the door, and the mother and grown-up daughters, who were shop-girls in Edinburgh and came home for the Sunday, used to march in *sans ceremonie* to get whatever they required. Belle, who was energetic, got up early on Sunday morning and went off to church. I was a good deal later, but presently tumbled out of bed and proceeded to have a good "all-over" wash. Standing at the washstand, minus any clothing, I was startled to see the door suddenly open, and shrieked out, "Oh, stop!" But in bounced our landlady without so much as "By your leave," and merely remarking, "Hoot, toot! It's no a mon!" sailed off across the room to get her husband's Sunday coat which was hanging in a cupboard. After she left I jammed a heavy box against the door to prevent further interruptions!

A crowd of dirty, ragged, little "bairns" ran about all over the place, and the mother triumphantly informed us that she had "had fourteen," evidently thinking it an achievement to be proud of. Entering our bedroom after an outing, I caught one filthy-faced urchin with my toothbrush in his mouth, while he rubbed his face with my piece of pumice-stone—to clean it, I presume—and a second dirty baby-boy was wiping his face vigorously with Belle's little face-sponge, sacred to some very special New York preparation. She looked at it in disgust next morning, seeing it was quite black, and asked if I knew what had happened

to it. I only laughed at the time, but after we left told her how I had caught those two dirty monkeys in our bedroom the day before, and what they were doing.

To reach our smart, little sitting-room we were obliged to go through the kitchen, which was also the family bedroom and living-room. Here, however, we were constantly intruded upon.

On Sunday morning before dinner three or four extremely common young men, sons of the household and daughters' lovers, were one by one brought in by our landlady and solemnly introduced to us. I must confess I didn't like it much, but should have been sorry to hurt the woman's feelings, because she was so evidently trying to pay us attention and be polite.

When late in the afternoon, after being out, we entered our sitting-room for tea, there was already a large family tea-party in full swing, and we were told we could have ours presently when they were finished ! Considering that we were paying for the room, this was rather cool, but all the same we liked the woman and her daughters too ; they were so intensely good-natured and willing to do anything for us that lay in their power. But oh ! I shall never forget the Sunday dinner ! We had asked our landlady if she could roast us a rabbit—we were constantly having rabbits—and she cheerfully assented. When she bore that rabbit in upon a large dish and deposited it upon the small round table where Belle and I were already seated, hungry and expectant, our eyes met, and the door was hardly closed when we both exploded ! It was lying on its back with all four legs sticking up in the air ! It was stuffed tightly with some sort of seasoning till its stomach exactly resembled that of “Punch,” and its stout little paunch was fastened

across and across with a tight lacing of string. Its head neatly reposed on a hard little cushion of fat pickled pork and, horrible to relate, the eyes had been left in and turned a dull, bleary gaze up to the ceiling. Altogether, bunny looked so unappetising that we made our dinner chiefly off tinned apricots and some delicious scones, Belle finishing off with her inevitable pickles.

I remember we had the greatest difficulty in "settling" at Wishaw, where also we were staying for the week-end. We got a room at last in a little countrified cottage at the end of the town with a young married couple. The man was an engineer in the steel-works—unless I am mixing up the towns and steel-works don't exist in Wishaw—at any rate, he was an engineer in some manufactory or other. We were very comfortable on the whole, but the people had never let rooms before and had some funny ideas about lodgers.

It was so late when we got settled that we had no time to do any catering for Sunday before the show began, so we asked the woman to board us. There were only two rooms, and we had to go through the bed-kitchen to get to our bed-sitting room. That didn't matter much—we had had the same experience before—but we found the couple expected us to take our meals with them in the front room, and as we did not like to make a fuss, we put our feelings in our pockets and bowed to the wishes of our hosts.

When we got home on Saturday night after the show, the man had gone to bed, but he put his face through the curtains and would keep talking while Belle and I had our supper. He'd been down to see *The Days of Nero*, and said he didn't like the

piece. It was "too solemn" for him. He liked a play with "lots of bloodshed and stranglin' in it." Said he, "You wanted a good strangler and lots of villainy, like *The Grip of Iron*." He was an awfully earnest young man and his comments were so killing, that "her ladyship," as he dubbed Sylvester, kept on going into fits of laughter. He told us he'd always wanted to go on the stage, but he didn't like "the cockney talk" in our piece (fancy applying this to the elegant, classical language used in *Nero* !), though he said he "knew a lot of the words" because he used to recite *Richard the Third*. Our landlord had lived down in the north of England for three years and was very proud of his English.

On Sunday morning the woman woke us up quite early by coming into our room, and told us she was going off to "Communion" with her husband, and would we cook the dinner? She said she would get us some breakfast before she went. She had got stewed rabbits for dinner (rabbits again !), and she told me to be sure and not let the pot boil over! So off she went, and, as Sylvester wouldn't stir, I had to fetch the coals and water from the garden outside, peel the potatoes, tidy up our room (pitching into Belle all the time), and do all sorts of things. The rabbits were in a big, round iron pot with three legs, slung from a hook over an open fire, and they either didn't cook at all, or boiled at a wild gallop every time I made up the fire. I consider I earned my dinner that day! But the people were very good-natured and seemed quite sorry when we went away on Tuesday morning.

In our next quarters we had a combined room on a flat up one of the narrow closes so common in the Scottish towns, and there I felt what it was to be district-visited.

I was lying on the bed in the afternoon, rather tired—Belle was out—idly gazing at the various decorations of the best room. Over the mantelpiece, above the glass, hung an old painting of "Bobbie" Burns and Highland Mary. We came across a picture of the former in four rooms out of six. Above my head was a gorgeous '87 Jubilee picture of our late Queen, and in one corner of the room there was a large, coloured head-and-shoulder portrait of General Gordon. On the wall opposite me hung a simpering, idiotic-looking girl dubbed "Modesty," and at right-angles there was a grim, old woodcut of John Knox, who looked at "Modesty" naughtily out of the corners of his eyes. In a corner by the fireplace hung a maple-framed "dam-brod" beautifully worked in squares of black and yellow wool; we had already seen two or three others in Scotland, and I suppose they were samplers.

Most of the pictures were "skied" and hung at a very acute angle to the wall, but lower down and stuck about haphazard, there was a large number of photos of extraordinary-looking individuals, probably related to our landlady. On the back of every chair was a crochet-work antimacassar, and the collection of ornaments was weird and wonderful. A low corner cupboard was crammed inside and out with glass dishes of every shape, old teapots, wine glasses, and goodness knows what! while on the mantelpiece were two or three lovely bits of old china that would have gladdened the eyes of any connoisseur. In the centre, under a glass shade and flanked by cheap, vulgar vases, was a bunch of tawdry, faded, silver ornaments from off a wedding-cake which seemed to lend a touch of pathos to the shabby room. Even landladies sometimes have a past romance!

Tired though I felt, I was not sleepy, and kept gazing around and making a mental inventory, when presently there was a knock at the door and I called out, "Come in!" thinking it was the landlady. But instead, an elegantly dressed woman entered and gave me a tract, while she severely reproved me for lying on my bed without a cloak over me, saying I should take cold. I'm afraid I was not over civil, and she quickly retired with a shake of the head, and probably a sigh over the ungracious manners of the poor. I thought of my own district-visiting experience (it only lasted two months) a year or two before, and idly wondered if the people I went to see used to feel as much annoyed with me as I did with that woman, or if I had worn a less condescending air?

When we went home in the evening after the show, the chimney nearly smoked us out, and we couldn't sleep because there was a musical clock that woke us up all night long, playing "Daisy Bell" every time the hour struck!

It did seem so curious, this life in one room, but I must say the people were very obliging as a rule. We often found them tolerably clean, though here and there the dirty rooms and general discomfort were very trying. On the whole we got pretty good cooking.

Sometimes we lodged with dear old Scotchwomen, who were kindness itself and took a delight in "mothering" us. Many is the time when one has placed a pot of delicious home-made bramble or apple jelly on the tea-table, or brought in nice hot scones and utterly refused any extra payment when we settled up next morning. It is a great thing sometimes to be able to take a favour gracefully—almost as good as knowing

how to bestow one—and many little acts of kindness can only be done even in this world by passing them on to other people.

“God bless ye, my lassies!” said one dear old dame who had really taken us in out of compassion for our weary looks. “I will be lying in the kirkyard, mebbe, befoor ye come this way agen.” After we had gone a few steps on our journey, Belle ran back and kissed her, and I felt a lump rise in my throat as I turned and saw the tiny bent figure and sweet old face framed in a pleated white cap, standing in the porch of the little cottage where we had spent the night.

At one place—Alva, I believe—we were settled in a charming one-roomed cottage with a tiny scullery opening out of it. Our landlady kept a little general shop a few yards along the other side of the road, and when we wanted anything we just went across for it. I ran over, minus hat and jacket, to get the pepper-castor filled for dinner. We just turned the doorkey when we went off to the hall at night and fetched it from our landlady on our return, and then were alone in our glory till the morning. There were two beds built into the wall—this fashion seems mostly a southern one—and a large, jolly kitchen fireplace at which our dinner was cooked. Our landlady had got a loom set up in her room behind the shop opposite, and Sylvester and I were greatly interested to see her weaving and asked her to explain it all, which she did in the kindest way. She then improved the occasion by talking to us very seriously about the profession and urged us both to give it up and take to “a respectable life.”

“I wouldna’ let ane o’ my bairns do sic’ a thing,” the old body said. “I’d greet my een oot! An’ I’d

gie thim a clip ower the lug ! Gae back to ye'er hame, my lassies, or gae oot as a hoosemaid or a cuik, as a decent body should do !"

We could seldom get two rooms, the best diggings were always caught up so quickly, and we had no addresses when we started from town like many other members of the company.

As for the hotels, they were perfectly ruinous for small-part people, though again and again Belle and I were forced to go to them because we found it quite impossible in some towns to get private rooms. We could seldom get accommodation at temperance hotels under five shillings a day per head, which included board—special terms for the poor "pros." I don't suppose this will strike many readers as exorbitant, but it was a great deal too much for slender purses, and our salaries did not nearly cover our expenses. There were a few professional lodgings in even the smallest place, but we were an unusually large company to visit many of these little towns, and the usual "digs" were filled directly. Several times it happened that some of the company could not get in anywhere, and then they had to settle in some town a few miles away and drive over after the show. This only occurred once to Belle and myself, but it was bitterly cold weather and we were nearly frozen, driving in the cold after the heated atmosphere of the stage and the dressing-rooms.

01 We were playing at Alexandria. For two hours Sylvester and I hunted in different directions without any result ; many of the people had conscientious scruples about harbouring actresses, and nobody would take us in. Then we went back to the hall to find several others in the same plight, so there was no help

for it but to go over to Dumbarton, where we were going to play the next night. Ten of us caught the two o'clock train and then the fun began again. Mr. Andrews had assured us there were plenty of rooms to be had, but we couldn't find any though we walked for miles. The managers had engaged all the spare rooms at the chief hotel by wire, so there we were shut out, but we turned in at three o'clock to have a proper dinner, for we were hungry and tired. Then we started off again and finally I got "settled" at five o'clock and returned to the "Elephant" in triumph.

Sylvester and several others were sitting dejectedly in the dining-room by the fire, having had no success, but Parry and young Hunt got settled just before six, and a trio of girls at 4.30. Three men got fixed somehow for the night only (we were going to stay two), and then we had to catch the 6.20 train back to Alexandria, play, feeling quite worn out, and finally return to Dumbarton by an open conveyance after the show. Our professional life wasn't by any means all "cakes and ale."

Of course there were compensations, not the least was being constantly amid such lovely scenery. I remember how charmed I was with Tellicoultry. Several of us climbed nearly to the top of its big, glorious hills, scrambling up through beautiful, fragrant pine-woods and along by a burn rippling down over the stones, and breaking, here and there, into lovely little waterfalls. We all hunted for a lucky four-leaved shamrock, but nobody discovered one.

Then I had a delightful day at Montrose, staying with dear friends, whose charming Scottish hospitality was simply perfect.

But I forgot—this chapter is supposed to be about "diggings" and we must "return to our muttons,"

I remember one place where we were obliged to go to the Temperance Hotel for two nights, and pay rather heavily, after nearly settling in a combined room. Bertie Verschoyle had given me the address, and I was very angry with him afterwards, though he declared he hadn't known the drawbacks of the place. It was a dirty-looking house, but I was dead beat and hadn't been able to find anything else, and the room was a good-sized one and double-bedded. First I had to settle the terms—the woman wanted one shilling and sixpence a night each, which I said was too much (we usually got our rooms for one shilling and threepence). To this the landlady at last agreed, but said, "I canna gie' ye a big fire for ane an' three, ye'll joost hae a middlin' ane'."

I was just off to tell Sylvester and fetch the bags, when the woman said, "Ye canna hae' the room to yersels, I dinna ken whither ye min' thet."

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

"Ou weel," she said, "ye can hae' ane bed atween ye baith, but I've got a lodger wha alwis sleeps in the ither."

"Dear me," said I, much put out, "I'm afraid we shouldn't like that at all!"

"Aweel, ye can please yersels!"

"Besides," I went on hesitating, for I dreaded to begin the weary quest again, "probably the lady herself would object."

"I didna' say it was a leddy—it's joost a mon!"

"A man! What! *Here?*"

"Ou aye! What for no?"

"Oh, it's quite out of the question!" said I with a bolt towards the door. "I'm quite sure my friend wouldn't like *that!*"

"Aweel," responded the woman calmly, "I dinna ken as I care to be bawthered wi' ye," and as I scampered down the close, she slammed the door after me with a bang that made me jump.

Almost the last week that we spent in Scotland, we stayed over Sunday with a family consisting of a mother, daughter and three sons. They lived in a flat of several rooms, and though Belle and I had only one, it was comfortable and well furnished. The young people were pleasant and fairly well educated, but the mother was of a broad, old-fashioned, peasant type. She came into the room on the afternoon of "the Sawbath" and caught me doing some very necessary needlework (I had little other chance), and looked at me in stern disapproval.

"Eh, my lass!" she said severely. "D'ye ken that befoor ye gae to heaven ye'll hae to pick oot ilka ane o' thae steetches wi' ye'er nose?"

I looked up and laughed. "I'm afraid I shall have a very poor chance of going to heaven at that rate," I replied; "but this isn't a case of choice; it's necessity, so perhaps some mercy will be shown me by St. Peter."

I went to church in the evening, and when Belle declined to accompany me, it didn't strike me that she had a party on, though I knew her weakness for holding receptions whenever she had a chance. I afterwards went for a long walk, and when I returned to our "diggings," letting myself in with a latch-key, crossed the hall and entered our room, it was a funny scene that met my gaze.

The visitors were scattered all round the room. The mother and daughter were seated on the sofa; the eldest son, a handsome, rather gentlemanly fellow, in

the easy chair, another youth in a rocker, while a great hobbledehoy was sprawling upon our bed! He had condescended to take off his boots, and they stood, large and massive, in the middle of the hearthrug. In the centre of the room stood Belle, with a scarlet coat drawn over her dress and a Glengarry cap slapped on the side of her head (one of the boys belonged to the militia or the volunteers). With eyes ablaze and with wild gesticulations, she was reciting one of Kipling's soldier poems, while the enthusiastic audience spurred her on with round after round of applause. I felt somewhat irritated by the state of affairs, but doffed my hat and coat and meekly subsided into a small chair in one corner of the room. Here I waited with slowly gathering annoyance for over an hour, while Belle recited piece after piece, revelling in the unaccustomed admiration—it had been so sadly lacking lately, for all the boys of our company had long before grown weary of her incessant demands upon them.

At last I could stand it no longer. "I am sorry to interrupt you," said I, rather stiffly, "but we have a very tiring journey to-morrow, and I should like to go to bed soon."

The family instantly got up with many apologies and retired, and then the vials of "her ladyship's" wrath poured down upon my devoted head.

"I never heard anything so abominably rude in all my life!" she stormed. "Actually telling people to go! And a charming family like that, too! I'm positively ashamed to be associated with you, and if it were not so near the end of the tour, I'd leave you to-morrow morning!"

"Oh, you can go!" said I, stolidly eating my supper. "I don't care—I wasn't going to have those people

here all night ; they'd never have gone at all if I hadn't made them. You seem quite to forget what a heavy day we shall have to-morrow ! Come to bed early, Belle, and don't behave like an ass ! ”

CHAPTER XI

AN EARLY TRAIN-CALL

THROUGH somewhat restless sleep, the sound of a church clock striking falls upon my ear, and I wake with a start and grope on the chair at the bedside for the matches, for I want to look at my watch and the daylight is not yet beginning. Five o'clock! and the train call is 6.30, with the station a mile and half away and the walk nearly all up-hill! I give Sylvester a poke in the ribs before jumping out of bed, with the remark, "Time to get up!" but she turns over to the wall with a sleepy grunt, and in a few seconds is again peacefully snoring.

The wind is howling dismally outside, the rain wildly plashing in torrents against the window, and I shiver with cold, and cast a wistful look at the fireless, ash-laden grate, as I draw on my stockings and dash into some clothes before lighting the evil-smelling paraffin lamp, and having a hurried wash in icy cold water at the improvised wash-stand behind the door. It consists of a jug and basin stuck on a wooden chair, and the small room is so packed with furniture that we can scarcely get round the table without knocking something over. We always perform our principal ablutions when we return from the show at night,

as we really need hot water after the grease-paints, heat, and dust of the theatre, and can seldom obtain it in the morning at these one-night stands. We also are often driven for time, though, luckily, I possess the faculty of waking just when I want to, and, consequently, Belle and I are not dependent upon being called by the landlady, as are many of the company.

A good thing, too, this morning, for we certainly have not been lucky in our "diggings." The room is not only small and uncomfortable, but the woman is rather disobliging. It's only for one night, however, so it doesn't much matter. One learns to be philosophical and to take things as they come when doing "the smalls" in a "Fit-up."

My wash over, I take out my curling-pins and begin to do my hair at the wretched, common looking-glass over the mantelpiece, but leave off to make a sudden dash at the bed.

"Belle, you really must get up!" I say, giving my companion a shake. "The breakfast will be in directly, and we shall have to be off in no time."

Belle gives a sleepy murmur, and then, with half-shut eyes, turns over and gets slowly out of bed; but once up, begins to dress with a rush to make up for lost time.

The room is a combined one, of which we have had so many lately, and the remains of last night's supper lie in unappetising disarray on the small square table in the centre. We have long got over the disgust we used to feel at being obliged to take our meals in the same room in which we sleep, but still are glad when our landlady enters to remove the litter and dirty plates, afterwards planking down a pot of tea and a dish of Ayrshire bacon completely spoiled by being fried to

chips. The bread and butter have been left over night on the table, and we eat our breakfast in hasty snatches while we finish dressing ; first a mouthful, then boots buttoned ; now a gulp of tea, then the clothes-brush snatched up and the mud-splashes hastily brushed off coat and skirt. We black and polish our own boots (already on our feet) with worn and stumpy brushes borrowed from the landlady—this necessitates a fresh rinsing of fingers—and then, while Belle packs the butter into a small gallipot with a bung, I collect the remainder of our various odds and ends, including cocoa, tea, and a pot of raspberry jam, which, later on, I find has “run” all over my clean collars and handkerchiefs.

We hastily stuff the things into the bags and finish by settling up with the landlady (she charges us sixpence too much, but we have neither time nor inclination for disputes), and then are off into the chill November morning air, the rain falling heavily with a steady persistence that is not a little trying to one’s temper.

A few minutes’ walk along small back streets brings us to the hall where we played last night, and soon we turn into the long and muddy country road leading to the railway station. It is a sharp ascent nearly all the way and takes away my breath, but I struggle bravely on laden with my heavy Gladstone bag, a rug, and an umbrella that threatens every minute to turn inside out in the wild gusts of wind and rain that beat against us in the unsheltered road. My companion is utterly regardless of appearances, and is, in consequence, the *bête noir* of Mr. Cobb’s existence ; for our stage-manager is most particular that the ladies of the company shall look “high class” off the stage, and Belle is far too

apt to "give the show away." This morning she is carrying a guitar-case—she won't budge an inch without her guitar—a small leather hand-bag, a yellow cardboard box, tied round with string and containing a large hat with feathers, far too precious to be worn this gusty morning, when her woollen "Tam" is amply good enough ; and last, but not least, an open-meshed string bag crammed to bursting with things of every description—a nightgown, rolled up in a piece of newspaper, a brush and comb peeping out, a couple of magazines, a sponge-bag, her inevitable bottle of pickles, and a packet of Quaker oats. The latter has a little hole in it, and consequently leaves a clue like Ariadne's ball of thread, by which—if it only were dry weather—we could retrace our steps as Theseus did his within the Cretan labyrinth. Clad in a Transatlantic, thick, blue travelling coat that comes down to her heels, but beneath which her feet, encased in lace-up boots and shiny goloshes, are plainly to be seen, and with a large Kodak slung over one shoulder, Belle certainly cuts a most extraordinary figure. Indeed we look an odd pair, no doubt, for some of the company are always poking fun at us.

"Oh, Jee Whilikins ! What a wind !" says Belle, stopping to take breath, but I'm afraid I say something stronger than "Jee Whilikins !" for at that instant a wild gust nearly bowls me over, and I have a regular fight with my umbrella, almost dropping the other things before I can manage to get it down without it turning inside out.

"I'll never tour an umbrella again, see if I do !" I say savagely, as I drag my burdened little figure alongside tall, good-looking Belle. "They always say at home I can't stir without an umbrella, and call me

‘Mother Gamp,’ but this tour has cured me once for all. It’s a downright nuisance up in these windy regions, for I really can’t spare a hand to carry it.”

Belle simply screams with irritating laughter. She is frequently screaming with laughter, in season and out of season, and she is either in boisterous spirits as at present, or right down in the depths of despair and knows no happy medium.

“Why don’t you leave it behind?” she says; “I should have, long ago.”

“Because,” I answered severely, “I can’t afford to part with a good umbrella just because it’s inconvenient. Every one isn’t so careless as you are and hasn’t got as much money either.”

“Don’t be nasty, Rosie,” retorts Sylvester, “I may be careless, but you know perfectly well I haven’t had any money sent me for an age. I guess my people in Boston have got an inkling I’m on the stage, and they always vowed I should never have another penny if I did it. I don’t know how I’m going to get along till the end of the tour on my wretched little salary. I believe I shall have to pawn my rings!”

We reach the station after many struggles, only to find that our scurry has been quite unnecessary, for none of the others have yet put in an appearance with the exception of “the staff.” Our wardrobe-mistress—dear, kind woman!—catches sight of us as we come through the booking-hall. “Oh, Miss Roupell!” she says, “you do look so wet and tired, but the waiting-room is open and there’s a big fire—come along and dry your things!” We follow her along the platform, and I am quickly down on my knees before the cheerful blaze, and carefully peeling a sticky veil off my nose, spread it to dry, while I afterwards take off

my felt hat and turn it upside down to let the water run out of the boat-shaped brim on to the floor. Belle was clearly born for a traveller, for, curiously enough, she always looks her best in stormy weather. She just gives herself a shake like a big Newfoundland dog and then, getting out the note-book and pencil she always carries in order to write down "impressions" (she says she is doing some articles for one of the American magazines), settles down to work in a warm corner.

Soon the other members of the company begin to straggle in, all wet and blown about like ourselves. Happy those who possess long coats or mackintoshes!

"Well, ladies, it's a wet morning!" says a cheerful voice as our tall, fine-looking actor-manager comes in to have a look at his flock. He is clothed in Norfolk jacket, golf knickers, roll-over stockings, and heavy boots, as are several of the other men, and, like Belle, doesn't look much the worse for his wet and boisterous walk.

"How's my Pansy blossom to-day?" says another voice, a deep, oily one, proceeding from a broad-shouldered, good-natured looking man whom somebody is calling "Pa." This is Nero, and he is addressing his Imperial Consort. Pansy, however, whose wet garments hang upon her angular frame as if she were a clothes-horse, seems desirous of escaping observation. She has evidently made a hasty toilet this morning, and damp little tails of hair stick about her face, lank and straight, or straggle untidily down her neck. She withdraws to an unsheltered corner whither no one else cares to follow, and, standing apart with the rain dripping on her hat, she pores over the big edition of Shakespeare which is scarcely ever out of her hands.

Talk about professional enthusiasm ! I never saw anything like hers !

Polly Hexham, the pianiste—jolly, little girl—is smiling away at everybody with her happy, mauve face—mauve because she lanolines it constantly with most religious fervour and then smothers it in pink powder, and the mixture produces a pinky-blue shade which she believes to be becoming, but somehow fails of its object. The ladies of our company, however, taken as a whole, are certainly not given to “make-up” off the stage. It is considered “bad form.”

Sulky Mr. Blane is scowling to himself in disagreeable silence in one corner of the waiting-room. An early train-call on a rainy day doesn't agree with his temper, but few things do.

Melancholy Groves stalks in with a bundle of golf clubs under his arm, and here is Tommy Hunt walking about and cracking idiotic jokes as usual. His coat is damp, but not his spirits.

Gladys Vane, our pretty little dancer, is rather drooping and pathetic this morning—she is by no means strong and the tour is trying her a good deal.

Here comes stout and red-faced Mr. Cobb, who walks up to Belle and looks at her various paraphernalia with a disgusted eye.

“What on earth makes you carry that awful string-bag ? It's a disgrace to the whole company,” he says. “And what, in heaven's name, is *that* ?” as he catches sight of the trail of Quaker oats across the floor. “Can't you wrap up your parcels in a respectable way ? I wonder what Drake would say to one of his ladies looking like a porter or a grocer's boy ! Mr. Rossiter is a great deal too easy-going with some of you girls ! I wouldn't allow it, the way you go on !”

"Pooh ! you go and smother yourself !" retorts Sylvester saucily. She cares for and fears nobody (except landladies), and is also a bit of a favourite with Cobb's superior officer, so our stage-manager beats a retreat, for he rather dreads Belle's cheeky tongue, knowing it to be a bad example to the rest of the ladies. He turns away, pretending not to have heard her answer, and pulling out his phial of homœopathic pilules, takes a few to soothe his feelings and to assist the digestion of his hasty breakfast. This operation over, he begins to talk to Miss Lefevre, whose marvellous dark eyes have weary rings beneath them, her handsome face looking worn and sallow in the early morning light.

Our dear, active, little business-manager peers anxiously about to discover if we have all arrived.

"Miss Collier and Miss McKenzie, where are they ?" he says in a nervous manner. "Oh, here they come !" with great relief, as two more dishevelled specimens of womanhood turn the station corner and hurry on to the platform. The train is coming in now—very late—but they take things easily in this part of the world. We haven't had a corridor car for some weeks, but our special carriage and the truck containing our scenery, frame and fittings, with all the heavy theatre baskets, are shunted across from the siding and coupled on. Two or three of us have been scrambling into doffed wet garments, and, catching up our various belongings, we get into our several compartments, each window adorned with a printed label, "The Dan Drake Co., *The Days of Nero*."

"Mr. Andrews !" calls out somebody, "two are not here ! Miss Delorme and Miss Gray !"

"Dear me, how tiresome !" says Andrews, all in a

pucker. "Those two ladies are always behind time!" but he goes up to the stationmaster and asks him to delay the train for a few minutes.

The calm way in which these local officials and country trains await the convenience of the passengers, is a thing to make a Londoner stare, but we are obliged to start some time or other, and Mr. Andrews is just leaving a couple of tickets behind with instructions to have his two missing ladies forwarded by the next train (four hours later), when "The Twins" dash wildly up, followed by their shaggy little terrier, who looks like a drowned rat. Their arms are loaded with small goods and chattels, which, in their flurry, they keep dropping about the platform, and as they are helped to scramble into the carriage by aid of several outstretched hands, first one thing and then another is picked up by somebody and pushed in after them, while, finally, "Bobs," who has nearly dashed under the train and been rescued by one of the boys, is bundled in—a wet and tangled mass—through the window, and, very much ashamed of himself, retires underneath the seat. The girls bump down, gasping for breath, and laughing between the gasps in the jolliest way, as if it were a gorgeous summer day, and they just off for a holiday.

"Oh, Roupell!" pants Ethel Gray. "We've had *such* a time! and we're so *thankful* to get away, aren't we, Chick?"

"Oh, *yes*!" says Miss Delorme, who isn't quite so much out of breath as the other girl. "We couldn't get any rooms yesterday and had to go to a horrid inn, where there were some cyclists and other men staying, and in the night, about two o'clock, there was such a noise when they came up to bed. I suppose thev

were drunk and one of them banged at our door, and another man said, 'Come away,' and the other one said, 'Oh, it's only some of the actresses from the theatre !' and he banged again and we were so *dreadfully* frightened !"

"Yes," chimes in Miss Gray ; "but there was a good bolt on the door, and Bobs barked in the most *awful* way, we were so thankful we'd got him, so they went away then, and we thought we should never get off to sleep, but we did at last and nobody ever called us, though the woman promised to *faithfully*, and when Chick woke it was six o'clock, and we were such a distance from the station, and we'd got to dress and pack and everything ! The rush was fearful ! Of course, we've had no breakfast !"

"You poor things !" says Elsie McKenzie. "I've got some biscuits and chocolate you shall have directly."

"Oh, you dear, old thing !" burst out "The Twins." "We've got heaps of things in our basket, only, of course, we've had no time to eat anything ! Apple ? No thanks, Sylvester, I can't eat a green apple at this time of the day. It may be wholesome, but it's not inviting on a cold, wet morning like this. It's awfully kind of you though ! Oh ! *do* look at poor Bobs !" as the wet, shivering doggie emerges tentatively from under the seat. "Isn't he perfectly *sweet* ? Saving his mistress's life and his auntie's too, dear little man ! He shall have a piece of Edinburgh rock in a minute."

We are fairly under way now, if that be a correct expression to apply to a railway train. Six of us are in the compartment, because Pansy has elected to be of our party this morning. Of course

we are supposed to have our own special places, but Mr. Andrews does not interfere, so the girls change about and travel as they like.

Belle, after munching the despised green apple, gets out her guitar, and, to a tum-tum accompaniment, begins to sing with vigour "Soldiers in the Park" in a high soprano voice.

"Now then, girls, chorus!"

"Oh, listen to the band!
How merrily they play,
'Oh, don't you think it grand?'
Hear everybody say.
Oh, listen to the band!
Who doesn't love to hark
To the shouts of 'Here they come!
And the banging——"

"Oh, shut up, Belle!" I say, giving her a thump.
"It isn't half-past seven yet and none of us are properly awake!"

"My good Sylvester," says Pansy sleepily, "are you ever by any chance quiet for half an hour together?"

"Oh, yes, when I'm in bed!" replies Sylvester.

"Not always then," I remark. "Didn't you worry my life out last night, saying that old woman had got such an evil face you believed she was going to murder us both before morning?"

"Well, I really thought so," retorts Belle, much aggrieved. "I'm quite sure she was capable of it;" and, with a preliminary twang at the guitar, she strikes up "There is a tavern in the town, in the town," but we all raise such a vigorous protest against her making so much noise while the day is yet so young, that she subsides for a time, and contents herself with

crooning tender Hawaiian love songs, of which she seems to know an inexhaustible number. They are pretty enough, though to me they all sound very much alike, but one is an especial favourite, and runs something like this—I won't vouch for the syllables :—



When you hear this repeated steadily for a quarter of an hour on end, it begins to grow monotonous, but as long as Belle is tolerably quiet no one cares to interfere.

Elsie McKenzie, always industrious, has brought out some beautiful embroidery, dingy from many railway journeys, and is already close at work.

"The Twins" have magazines and Edinburgh rock to pass the time, and I a big bundle of newspapers. Some weeks ago one of the girls told Mr. Rossiter, when he was complaining that they were "so frivolous," that "Rosie read the papers," and ever since, with thoughtful kindness, he has kept me his *Daily Telegraph*, which is sent to him regularly. Sometimes he forgets to bring it for a day or two, and then I get a bundle all at once, as to-day. The outside one is too wet to be of any use, but with my weekly packet from home inside my Gladstone bag, I have plenty of reading for the next two or three hours.

Pansy presently takes the opportunity to supplement

her first hasty toilet. She takes off her soaked sailor hat and puts it up on the rack, and then, producing from her bag a comb and looking-glass, proceeds to put her hair in curlers. Nero's consort next powders her face, bestowing an extra dose on her very shiny nose, and finally, taking up her big Shakespeare, begins to study in a monotonous undertone the part of Rosalind.

We are off on our journey to the next town. The distance is not very great as the crow flies, but it is across country, and we have to be shunted about from line to line, so we shall not arrive till nearly twelve o'clock. Then the hunt for rooms begins again ! Oh, heavens ! All one-night towns this week !

CHAPTER XII

GOODBYE

“**L**ADIES, every one on the stage to-night after the show, for the presentation, please!” says Mr. Cobb before we begin.

It only wants a week to the end of the tour, and this is a Saturday night.

Mr. Rossiter is leaving us, much to the sorrow of everybody in the company, with the exception of his understudy, to whom it will give a chance to show what he can do.

Our chief is going to try that hazardous speculation, taking out a company “on his own,” and is obliged to go up to London in order to attend to all the important business necessary beforehand.

Mr. Andrews is going to join him when our tour is ended, and so are two or three others of the company, but for the great majority it is a long and sad farewell.

Our actor-manager is one of those fortunate persons who possess one of the greatest gifts with which mankind is blessed, the power of attaching to them most of those with whom they come in contact. Norris has refused a tempting offer from Dan Drake in order to cast in his lot with Mr. Rossiter’s uncertain

fortunes, and many a one has said, "Don't you think you could find *me* a little part, Mr. Rossiter?" though one would think they had had enough of "Fit-ups" for the present, and the chief has booked many of these little towns for his own show. It will be nothing like as hard a tour as this one, however, Rossiter intending to have very few one-night stands, and as there are not many in the cast, there will be sufficient dressing-room accommodation and professional lodgings also.

Dear old chief! It is scarcely possible to have a nicer manager than he has been. Somewhat weak he may be, and certainly far too partial, but always courteous and hardly ever out of temper. We have got some really nice presents for him, and every subscription has been cheerfully given.

There is a gloom hanging over the whole company all the evening, which we find it impossible to shake off, and Catullus seems to play for the last time what is one of his favourite parts, with a deep and real emotion, for there are actual tears upon his cheeks in company with the usual vaseline ones. Knowing we shall be rather late on account of the presentation, we are all anxious to get forward with our dressing, and a good many of us take off our tights and our make-up, and sneak into various articles of ordinary clothing under our classical robes, each one trusting that Mr. Cobb will be so absorbed in other ways, that she will pass muster with the crowd and escape his all-detecting eye.

Two or three there are who can't possibly get ahead like this, because of the parts they are playing, and they eye the others discontentedly and grumble.

"Hand me that towel quick, Grace!" says one of

'The Twins.' "I mean the one on the floor, I dropped it just now."

Grace picks up a dirty looking rag, and is passing it across to the speaker when "the Empress," who is dreamily absorbed in arranging her Christian drapery, comes to life suddenly and makes a grab.

"That's my veil!" she says indignantly. "It fell down when I took off my laurel-wreath!"

Ethel makes a little *moue* of disgust. "I'd have it washed if I were you!" she says, "It isn't fit to touch! None of your things ever are!" the last few words *sotto voce*.

"Have it washed!" says Pansy with solemn indignation, "and we only a week from the end of the tour. I wouldn't have it washed now if it were three times as dirty!"

"I know I've got time to do up my hair," calls out somebody; "here, Rosie, lend me the company comb, there's a good sort!"

The "company comb" is my property, and has recently been dubbed so because it is almost the only one left among the small-part people, and it goes round and round the room in turn among a good many girls. (*N.B.*—I possess another one, which I carefully keep stowed away beneath my "stage props" for private use, but this fact is not generally known, though the other night that, too, disappeared. I stayed after all the others had left the dressing-room for the last scene, and searched everywhere till I found my lost property and rejoiced.)

"Good gracious, Belle!" bursts out Gladys, staring at my chum in round-eyed wonder. "I do believe you've got all your clothes on underneath your robes! Won't you catch it if Mr. Cobb sees you!"

"Much I care for old Cobb!" says Belle, with a contemptuous snort; "he'll be too busy to-night to notice me, and if he does I shall cheek him! We're only a week from the end of the tour!"

Belle's appearance is funny beyond description. She is such a large woman that her Christian robes are scanty and short at the best of times. To-night she looks like a tightly stuffed sailor's bag or a gigantic sausage with a head, and instead of sandals and apparently bare feet above them, there is a pair of thick lace-up boots and a gaily-striped petticoat appearing beneath her sober brown gown, while the hands of the poor Christian martyr are smothered in handsome modern rings.

"Last scene, ladies!" calls out Norris, banging at our door.

"Oh, mercy, I'm not half ready! Whatever shall I do? I've only got one stocking on!"

"You're all right, dear! Just look at *me*," says a girl whose face is a jumbled mass of red and black and blue, as she dives afresh into her grease-pot and wildly scrubs the "make-up" off her face with somebody else's towel.

"Never mind, they'll have to wait!" remarks Grace philosophically.

"Last scene, ladies!" roars Cobb outside. "All late again! I'll fine every single one of you!" and we scramble on to the stage as best we can, some of us struggling into our draperies as we go and still arranging them as the front cloth rolls up revealing the next scene.

It's a motley crew, indeed, that assembles on the stage after the show for the presentation. Nearly all the men are in classical robes and a few of the girls,

but others there are attired in up-to-date walking-dress, while some appear in a most extraordinary mixture of both, with hair rolling down their backs. But nobody looks to see how the others are dressed. All eyes are fixed on that stately figure, clad in a creamy-white Roman garment, that sweeps in graceful lines around his well-built form. Mr. Andrews, in a few well-chosen, touching words, presents our offerings to the chief—soon chief no longer—and in a halting voice, broken by emotion, Mr. Rossiter tries to thank us all.

“In all the years I have spent in the profession,” he says, “I have never had a nicer company or a better staff. You all know how I love my art, but only those who are really on the stage can realise what a very precarious calling we professionals follow. I am about to try an experiment which I fervently hope will be successful, but it is just possible that it may mar my career for years to come, and I am no longer a very young man. We have all grown attached to each other, and I shall never forget any of you. I know you will all wish me success in *Deeds that Live*, and—and——”—poor, dear, old Rossiter! He is so dreadfully upset that he can’t go on, but breaks right down and almost sobs. He shakes all the men by the hand and kisses every girl while saying “Goodbye!” “Dear old Flossie!” he says as he comes to Miss Hare, “the best girl in the show!” (Flossie is one of the troublesome ones, and has been threatened with her notice more than once, but what does that matter now?)

“Let’s all join hands and sing ‘Auld Lang Syne,’” says little Mr. Andrews, who is anxious for the chief, being very fond of him, and what a big circle

we make on this small stage, as everybody, staff included, clasps hands and swings them to and fro, while we swallow the big lumps in our throats, and join with shaky voices in the dear old song penned by the immortal bard of "Bonnie Scotland" :—

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne?"

In twos and threes we sorrowfully leave the pathetic scene that none of us youthful "pros" will ever forget, and drift back to the dressing-rooms, whither, with thoughtful kindness, Mr. Rossiter quickly despatches some bottles of champagne in which to drink his health and success to *Deeds that Live*.

We are all determined to see the very last of the chief and to give him a good send-off. He is going up to London to-morrow by the night mail, and just before nine o'clock on Sunday evening Belle and I turn out to walk to the railway station.

Oh, how bitterly cold it is! Snow has fallen heavily during the last few days, and now is trodden hard and slippery under foot. The frost obscures each window-pane, and from every ledge and tree and railing hang gleaming, big, white icicles.

My chum and I walk along in silence for a few minutes, and then Belle says, soberly—

"Well, Rosie, there's only one more week now, and then, perhaps, it's 'goodbye' for ever! Who knows?"

"Oh, we shall meet again, dear old girl!" I reply, trying to be cheerful. "You know they say people always meet three times in this profession; but any

way, Belle, I want you, when we are parted, to please forget all the quarrels and only remember the good times we've had together."

"We never have quarrelled, midget," says Belle with energy. "I don't know what you mean, you dear little soul, and I shall always be fond of you and write to you every week!" and poor old Belle means every word when she says it, but, alas! for promises.

There are not many people out, and in a long, quiet street leading to the station a few of our boys are having a snowballing match *en route*.

They only say "Good evening" as we pass, but I suppose our backs are too tempting to be resisted, for ball after ball comes whistling by or breaks upon our hats or coats. Suddenly one catches me neatly under the ear, and startled, I clutch wildly at Belle. We stagger on the slippery path, both lose our balance, and go down full length on the hardened snow. I, being small and active, quickly scramble up again, but Belle is so large and heavy that she can't at once get upon her feet, and lies kicking like an old cab horse! I try to pull her up, but am dying with laughter, and as the boys are now close upon us, Tommy Hunt gallantly drags her up and props her against the wall. As soon as she gets her breath—

"You little fool!" says Belle, wrathfully, "to pull me over like that! You're always doing the most idiotic things! I shall be downright glad to see the back of you next Sunday!"

"But you know we never quarrel, dear?" I respond, meekly; "you said so just now!" and as her eyes flash and she begins another tirade I scamper along with Tommy, and leave Belle to be consoled by the other boys.

We find no fire when we get to the waiting-room, and we stamp our feet to try and get a little warmth into them as we march up and down the platform, and are gradually joined by nearly every member of the company.

Truly, Mr. Rossiter is a popular man, for we have got a six o'clock train-call in the morning, and a five hours' journey down into the north of England, where our last week is to be spent, yet there is scarcely a man or girl absent on this freezing, bitter night.

The few passengers waiting for the mail or other trains (this is a junction) stare with curiosity at our chattering groups, who keep peering impatiently along the platform and down the steps.

Here he is at last ! Rug over arm and well wrapped up in travelling-coat, Mr. Andrews at his side, and sturdy, faithful little Norris bringing up the rear with a large portmanteau.

We all press forward to try and have a word, and up to the last our manager is as courteous and pleasant to all the small-part people as to any of the principals. But there is little time for talk, for he has arrived late at the station and the mail is nearly due. Lights now twinkle in the distance, and in a few seconds the train is alongside the platform with a rush. Little Mr. Andrews dashes forward and secures a corner seat for the chief in a first-class "smoker," already occupied by three men well wrapped up in travelling rugs.

Mr. Rossiter, who is merely laden with a portmanteau and a rug (his larger luggage is going up to town next Sunday with the rest of "the stuff"), enters the carriage amid the curious gaze of his fellow-passengers—they, no doubt, wonder at his following—and we all crowd round the door for a last look and hand-shake.

The chief's principal attention, however, is given to our business-manager.

"You'll attend to that affair, old man, directly you get to the office?" says Mr. Andrews.

"Yes, of course, I'll see Drake first thing in the morning, and then I'll wire at once. Don't forget to try and get that date at Maryport!"

"Not likely! I'm afraid you'll have a cold journey."

There's a general chorus—"Goodbye, Mr. Rossiter, goodbye! Good luck!"

"Goodbye, everybody!" he says, as he waves his hand in response.

"Stand away, there!" shouts the guard, as the train begins to move.

"Now, boys and girls! Three cheers for the chief!" calls out little Andrews, and as, into the night, the mail speeds south towards dear, smoky, old London—that longed-for Mecca of every professional—and for a few seconds we can still see the tall, familiar figure blocking up the carriage window, we raise the echoes of the quiet station and scandalise the "gude" Scotch folk upon this silent "Sawbath nicht" with a loud "Hooray! Hoo—ray!! Hoo—ra—ay!!!"

Out into the cold, strolling players all——out into the darkness and the unknown!

Give us "a round," dear, generous public, as we ring down the curtain!

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